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Struggling with Famine in Warlord China: Social Networks, Achievements, and Limitations, 1920-21

DISSERTATION

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by

Pierre Emery Fuller

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Kenneth Pomeranz, Chair
Professor Jeffrey Wasserstrom
Professor Guo Qitao

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To my parents,
David and Isabelle Fuller,
for all the love and support,

and to Faruk Tabak,
a great mind and spirit
taken away from us far too soon

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Pierre Emery Fuller
University of California, Irvine
Department of History

Education

2011 University of California, Irvine
Ph.D., Department of History
Dissertation: "Struggling with Famine in Warlord China: Social Networks, Achievements, and Limitations, 1920-21"

1998 Georgetown University
B.A., Departments of English and Theology

Fellowships/Grants

UC Irvine Graduate Dean's Dissertation Fellowship, Summer 2011

UC Irvine School of Humanities Summer Dissertation Writing Grant, 2010

Glenn Schaeffer Dissertation Writing Fellowship, UC Irvine, 2009-10

Fulbright Grant, China, 2009

Harvard-Yenching/Peking Univ. Fellowship in Advanced Chinese Studies, 2008

International Center for Writing and Translation Summer Research Grant, 2008

UC Irvine Humanities Center Summer Research Grant, 2006

Taiwan Ministry of Education Scholarship for Mandarin study, 2005

Glenn Schaeffer Fellowship in Creative Nonfiction, UC Irvine, 2004-08

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Struggling with Famine in Warlord China:
Social Networks, Achievements, and Limitations, 1920-21

By
Pierre Emery Fuller
Doctor of Philosophy in History
University of California, Irvine, 2011
Professor Kenneth Pomeranz

This dissertation makes the case that in China's most severe food crisis of the first quarter of the 20th century, the great north China famine of 1920-21, considerable life-saving relief was generated by three segments of society largely neglected in the existing literature: Buddhist and other native charity efforts working along parallel social channels to the better-publicized missionary and international relief groups; the Republic's maligned military establishment; and officials and residents of the stricken communities themselves who were operating largely "below the radar" of the distant, mostly city-based chroniclers of the famine whose interpretations have been privileged in subsequent histories.

In the process, this study makes several historiographic interventions: first, it expands the study of modern north China relief beyond the imperial and modern state apparatus. In doing so, one can identify a paternalistic relief culture shared by state and extragovernmental actors in the countryside that operated at multiple levels simultaneously and that persisted despite the Qing collapse and increased marginalization of China's interior. Second, this study offers a corrective to the scholarly emphasis on the culture of "modernizing" elites in more affluent and Western-influenced south China and the treaty ports, arguing that the prominence of southern elites in late 19th and early 20th century disaster relief elsewhere in the country was more a function of shifting economic resources to the coasts and new forms of media than the emergence of a new "modern"

civic or humanitarian consciousness. This corrective allows us to trace continuities with traditional Chinese society stretching well into the 20th century, to appreciate the social dynamic of inland communities, and to recognize the possibility of multiple, alternative modernities coinciding in China's many regions. Finally, this study suggests that the dating of China's descent into a country of predatory state policies, widespread social dislocation, and incessant civil war – all the hallmarks of "warlordism" – be pushed back to the mid-1920s, half a decade after our famine. In short, this dissertation offers grounds for the reconsideration of the trajectory of modern Chinese history through the prism of social responses to disaster in the early 20th century.

Introduction

Under dry summer skies, Wang Quan and fellow villagers secured a statue from the tomb of the Ma family – stole it, some said – before summoning hundreds of other residents in the hamlet of Xindiancun. With a likeness of the Dragon King[1] now in their possession – a deity associated with bodies of water, large and small, and the life-giving rain – the men led a dozen girls in a procession under the June sun, each holding up a vase in the style of Guanyin, the Daoist immortal and Buddhist goddess of mercy. An equal number of boys followed, each waving a small flag inscribed with words hailing the Dragon King, after which twelve widows marched holding brooms and winnowing fans. Two hundred men and boys playing the part of sea creatures crowded behind them, costumed as turtles or fish and with jars filled with willow branches perched on their heads. Finally, a lone man held the rear, lugging a heavy metal shovel, a gesture of repentance to the gods. As the procession passed points throughout the area, the marchers beat turtle shells with willow branches, and sprinkled water on the passing ground.[2] But nothing fell from the sky.

The precariousness of communities cultivating the soil of north China did not stem from volume of rainfall alone, but also from its precise timing. "Every year farmers looked at the sky and worried," Henrietta Harrison has written on life in mountainous Shanxi in the late Qing, "if

[1] Villages in north China each had a temple to the Dragon Kings, o*r longwang*, as did irrigation gate associations that traditionally existed to manage and negotiate water use within farming communities. Prasenjit Duara has found examples of what he calls this "nearly universal feature" of Chinese communities stretching from Inner Mongolia through Henan and Shaanxi down to the New Territories of Hong Kong and Taiwan. Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 31.
[2] This is a rough translation of a news brief that appeared in a small Beijing daily, *Xiao gongbao*, 3 July 1920.

the rain fell too late they would not be able to plant the wheat; if the rain fell for the planting but then did not fall on the seedlings, the wheat would whither and only the hardier (but less valuable) millet and sorghum would survive; in the worst scenario of all, the millet and sorghum too would fail,"[3] forcing many to turn to famine foods for survival. Variations on rain-seeking rituals, enlisting entire communities using an eclectic combination of popular Buddhist, Confucian and Daoist symbols, had been performed throughout the Qing empire, often with official patronage from the *yamen*, the seat of county government.[4] But our procession, snaking its way through parched fields of millet and sorghum in the northern outskirts of Beijing, was nine years into the Chinese Republic. "A year ago today we had our last rain," John Griffith wrote two months later from a Canadian Presbyterian mission in Anyang, north Henan, hundreds of miles to the south. It was August 30, 1920.[5]

Skirting the mountains of Shanxi, the Yellow River spills onto the great alluvial plains of north China before taking its present course north of the Shandong peninsula to the sea. On the left bank of this eastward push lie some of China's oldest city sites, Anyang, in north Henan, and Xingtai in the south of Hebei, and, further beyond, the nation's capital, Beijing, and its twin city, the port of Tianjin. As if a shower curtain had been drawn along the river from its Shanxi descent to its outlet into the Bo Hai sea, the Yellow River's left bank had not seen more than a splatter of rainfall in the twelve hard months leading into autumn of 1920. Weak or disastrous fall harvests lay in store for more than 300 counties across the North, spelling more than hunger for tens of millions living on already thin margins of existence: without the dried stalks of sorghum or millet there was next to no fuel, nor roofs, nor fences for livestock. Winter clothes would be

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[3] Henrietta Harrison, *The Man Awakened from Dreams: One Man's Life in a North China Village, 1857-1942* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 28.
[4] See Jeffrey Snyder-Reinke, *Dry Spells: State Rainmaking and Local Governance in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, Harvard University Press, 2009).
[5] *North China Herald*, 4 Sept. 1920.

pawned off for seed and food, furniture and house beams sold by the *jin*, and children held up for sale in market squares, all over an area harrowingly similar in geographical extent to that of the horrific drought famine of the 1870s, which had struck the same five provinces of Zhili (Hebei), Shandong, Shanxi, Henan, and Shaanxi.

The paradox of 1920-21

The disaster that struck in the fall of 1920 was just one in a litany of drought and flood famines in China's modern period, especially in the area of the north China plain characterized over the centuries by cylical and irregular rainfall and chronic silting of the river system.[6] But the famine in 1920 also occurred at a watershed in Chinese political and cultural life. The rainless skies and resulting famine conditions coincided with a stretch of time spanning the student-led protests of May Fourth 1919 (after the Treaty of Versailles awarded coastal Shandong to the Japanese, adding fuel to a movement underway seeking a reinvigorated "New Culture" with which to face the emerging new world order) to the inaugural meeting of the Chinese Communist Party in Shanghai in July 1921, just as Nationalist leader Sun Yatsen was staking his claim on the Chinese presidency from his Canton power base in the South. Drought also hit an overwhelmingly agricultural society in 1920 at the very nadir of central state administrative power and fiscal solvency, a nine year old Republic that had brought the mountains of debt obligations inherited from its fallen Qing predecessor to new heights. The state apparatus was disintegrating, no less, under the rise of provincial military governors competing for claims on sources of state revenue while, at the onset of famine, the smoke had hardly cleared from the first formal inter-provincial fighting of the 1920s warlord period, the Zhili-Anhui war fought in the

[6] For a detailed discussion of this subject, see Lillian Li, *Fighting Famine in North China: State, Market, and Environmental Decline, 1690s-1990s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 27-30.

environs of Beijing in July 1920. Yet, despite all this, despite these myriad obstacles and distractions – including roaming bandits and disbanded soldiers and a worldwide economic slump that year – relief of the great north China famine of 1920-21 would be a resounding success. Some 500,000 people perished from hunger, exposure or related diseases over the year, around three percent of the minimum twenty million stricken residents of the North, an awful loss, but a fraction of the death toll from the disaster's Qing, Nationalist, or Communist-era counterparts.[7]

Making sense of this paradox, of a humanitarian feat executed nine years into the warlord period of the fledgling post-Qing Republic and on the eve of state disintegration and incessant civil war, is the main focus of this study. In the process, this study will make several historiographic interventions. The first points out that the relatively recent move by historians away from the "impact-response" model of explanation for the modern Chinese experience – a model that had ascribed primary agency to "Western" forces as a spur to change in 19th and 20th century China in all matters political, social and intellectual – has not ventured inland enough from the glare of coastal treaty ports like Shanghai and Tianjin where interactions with the wider world have been most intense. This has allowed historians to miss key social phenomena playing out in the interior of the country where the vast majority of Chinese have lived. Only by examining these inland communities on their own terms – in our case, through the area of poor

[7] In the Republican era alone (1912-49), multiple localized disasters such as floods, earthquakes and epidemics across China took the lives of tens or even hundreds of thousands each. Only five modern drought famines, though, rivaled 1920-21 in their intensity, each resulting in much higher death tolls: From nine to thirteen million died in the north China famine of 1877-79; several million died in 1899-1900 Shaanxi and elsewhere in the North; ten million died in the drought of 1928-30 following the Northern Expedition by the Nationalists, a dry spell that hit the same provinces struck the 1870s and 1920-21 plus Gansu and Inner Mongolia; three million perished in the Henan famine of 1942-43 amid the Sino-Japanese war; and as many as thirty million to fifty million people died in the famine following the Great Leap Forward in 1959. Xia Mingfang, *Minguo shiqi ziran zaihai yu xiangcun shehui* (Natural disasters and rural society in the Republican era) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), 395-9. Kathryn Edgerton-Tarpley, *Tears from Iron: Cultural Responses to Famine in Nineteenth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 1. Frank Dikötter, *Mao's Great Famine: the History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe* (New York: Walker & Co., 2010), 324-37. Eduard B. Vermeer, *Economic Development in Provincial China: Central Shaanxi since 1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 31.

relief – can the nature and continued relevance of traditional Chinese culture in the modern period be properly understood. In other words, the historiographical focus on the cosmopolitan culture of China's littoral in the 20th century has, in important ways, stressed disruptions while glossing over continuities with China's late imperial period. Second, this study proposes that the dating of China's descent into a country of predatory state policies, widespread social dislocation, and incessant civil war – all the hallmarks of "warlordism" – be pushed back to the mid-1920s, half a decade after our famine. As our examination of events in 1920-21 will show, both urban and rural communities and the military establishment in power across the North were surprisingly attentive to social welfare needs despite the tremors of the civil wars to come.

The event as it stands today

Our current understanding of the great north China drought famine of 1920-21 sees the year's extraordinary relief success as a function of the combined interventions of foreigners and cosmopolitan Chinese using "modern" relief models inspired, if not imported, from overseas, thus fitting into the rocky but steady trajectory of relief advances by a modernizing Chinese society from the 1870s into the twentieth century. In this view, any noteworthy relief in 1920 beyond that mobilized by President Woodrow Wilson in the United States and his activist minister to Beijing, Charles P. Crane, was generated in China's major cities (Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai, along with provincial centers Taiyuan, Jinan, Kaifeng, etc.) through the vehicle of joint Chinese-foreign relief societies, each taking on a designated part of the disaster zone. The dominance by the international committees of the 1920-21 relief narrative was, however, a product of their own publicity. They issued reports on the crisis from their urban vantage points that became the default sources for

historians later piecing together narratives of the event, which, occurring in the so-called warlord period (1916-27), remains very much a black hole in China's historiography.

While producing some of the seminal works of modern Chinese literature and thought, this chaotic period left only spotty archival sources on matters of poor relief in north China, at least until the arrival of the Nationalists in 1928, when documentary generation and safekeeping resumed in earnest again. Consequently, sources pertaining to famine relief in the early Republic remain, at best, thin and scattered, and while archive-based studies do exist on *particular* urban charitable institutions spanning the pre-Nationalist Republican period (1912-27),[8] we lack a broad, textured picture of relief in turbulent 1920s north China, and especially of local responses to the early Republic's greatest humanitarian challenge. Into this vacuum entered what has remained the most authoritative account available on the famine. This was a 1922 wrap-up report by the main international relief society founded in the capital in response to the famine, *The North China Famine of 1920-1921: with Special Reference to the West Chihli Area*, authored by staffers of the Peking United International Famine Relief Committee. These compilers in Beijing put total relief expenditure for the year at $37 million, which is a remarkably modest total for *all* relief actors domestic and foreign, urban and rural, public and private, and a fraction of the estimated need at the outset of famine. "Two dollars per person per month will sustain life," an American missionary had written the U.S. consul in Jinan, Shandong, in late summer 1920. "Take your pencil and figure it out – 7,000,000 people, five months, two dollars a month." Estimates of the numbers needing aid to survive to the spring harvest soon topped twenty million, and $200 million became the most

[8] Vivienne Shue, "The Quality of Mercy: Confucian Charity and the Mixed Metaphors of Modernity in Tianjin," *Modern China* 32/4 (2006), 411-52. Ruth Rogaski, "Beyond Benevolence: A Confucian Women's Shelter in Treaty-Port China," *Journal of Women's History* 8/4 (Winter 1997), 54-90. Both Shue and Rogaski focus on Tianjin's Hall of Spreading Benevolence (*Guangrentang*).

common estimate of the relief needed to avert mass starvation.[9] The discrepancy between funds needed to carry tens of millions through the year and this $37 million is mammoth. Even if projected needs were indeed overblown – if in the end just half, even a third of $200 million was actually spent in the course of the relief effort – this would still mean many millions of native relief dollars remain unattributed. More, the foreign chroniclers of the famine credited non-Chinese with a full *four tenths* of this $37 million total in relief expenditure for the year, putting a decidedly foreign veneer to relief finance and execution.[10] Much of this study is aimed at sketching what was occurring in these yawning numerical gaps.

Practically all treatments of the great north China famine of 1920-21 stem from this one problematic source from 1922, citing the forty percent foreign share in the humanitarian effort and/or impossibly low relief total of $37 million. This includes *China: Land of Famine*,[11] an influential study written five years after the famine by Walter Mallory, an American then heading the China International Famine Relief Commission, and, in the 1960s, Andrew Nathan's slim but

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[9] The Peking United International Famine Relief Committee estimated a need of $210 million (20 million people for seven months at $1.50 a head) on October 26 while the North China (Tianjin) International Society for Famine Relief put the need at $200 million. Gauss to Crane, 9 Sept. 1920, SDF 893.48g/29. United International Famine Relief Committee to the Chinese President, 26 Oct. 1920, FO 228/3029/211. *Peking & Tientsin Times*, 5 Nov. 1920.

[10] All the above figures are in Mexican silver dollars, a currency still widely used in the Republic. The report was issued in both Chinese and English versions and republished in 1971 Taipei. Dwight W. Edwards, ed., *The North China Famine of 1920-21, with Special Reference to the West Chihli Area being the Report of the Peking United International Famine Relief Committee* (Taipei: Ch'eng Wen Publishing Company, 1971. First printed Beijing, 1922), 26.

[11] Walter Mallory, *China: Land of Famine* (New York: American Geographical Society, 1926). In the intervening years, a prominent Oxford sinologist composed a biography of a fellow Briton, Timothy Richard, who been active in relief of the 1870s famine: "it may justly be said that to Richard more than to anyone else belongs the honour of establishing the system of Famine Relief which has since done such valuable service in China," William Soothill wrote in 1924. William Soothill, *Timothy Richard of China: Seer, Statesman, Missionary & the Most Disinterested Adviser the Chinese Ever Had* (London: Seeley, Service & Co, Ltd., 1924), 108. Other works on Richard followed, such as E. W. Price, *Timothy Richard: a Narrative of Christian Enterprise and Statesmanship in China* (London: The Carey Press, 1945). Paul Richard Bohr, *Famine in China and the Missionary: Timothy Richard as Relief Administrator and Advocate for National Reform, 1876-1884* (Cambridge, Mass.: East Asia Research Center, Harvard University Press, 1972). Bohr's work had been anticipated by a similar study: Irwin T. Hyatt's "Protestant Missions in China, 1877-1890 and the Institutionalization of Good Works," in Kwang Ching Liu, ed., *American Missionaries in China: Papers from Harvard Seminars* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard East Asian Monographs, Harvard University Press, 1966).

widely-cited volume on the same commission.[12] Marie-Claire Bergère followed with a piece on the 1920-21 food crisis, which, based heavily on the treaty-port press and consular reports, was categorical in its depiction of official negligence by the year's military governors, contributing to a favored genre of Chinese history study in the Cold War: the colorful warlord characters of the early Republic presiding over China's militarization and descent into civil war.[13] In one example, military governor Yan Xishan's "own attempts to alleviate suffering" in 1920-22 Shanxi "failed because local officials remained indifferent to his pleas, while the rich ignored his prohibitions against hoarding grain and violated the ceiling he place on the price of foodstuffs," in the words of Donald Gillin. "But he received invaluable assistance from the American Red Cross and missionary organizations…"[14] "The most tragic characteristic of warlordism was the oppression, injury, and hardship that it inflicted on the Chinese people," James Sheridan seconded in his study of Feng Yuxiang, the so-called "Christian general" active in the Zhili clique of warlords in 1920-21. "During the warlord era there was little constructive governmental action, even in critical emergencies. When famine or plague struck, provincial warlord governments often failed to provide effective relief; their disorder and greed also rendered it difficult or impossible for foreign relief organizations to aid the suffering people."[15] As for the Ministry of the Interior in 1918-1923, seated in Beijing under the Beiyang regime, "its duties in public health, famine relief, and local administration were neglected," as Andrew Nathan summarily treated the matter in his study of the

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[12] At the end of the decade, Jonathan Spence's profile of Michigan engineer Oliver Todd in his volume *To Change China* kept Americans at center stage in the narrative of 1920s famine relief. Andrew Nathan, *A History of the China International Famine Relief Commission* (Cambridge, Mass.: East Asia Research Center, Harvard University Press, 1966), 6. Jonathan Spence, *To Change China: Western Advisors in China, 1620-1960* (Boston: Little Brown, 1969), 205-16.

[13] Marie-Claire Bergère, "Une crise de subsistence en Chine, 1920-1922." *Annales: Economies, Societés, Civilisations* 28, no. 6 (Nov.-Dec. 1973): 1361-1402.

[14] Donald G. Gillin, *Warlord: Yen Hsi-shan in Shansi Province, 1911-1949* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 37,

[15] James E. Sheridan, *Chinese Warlord: the Career of Feng Yu-Hsiang* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), 24.

period.[16] Studies of the Christian missions in the academic press regularly took up the theme of the performance of good works in China against the greatest of odds. In one example, Alvyn Austin's *Saving China* on Canadian missions in the country, baldly asserts that in the "drought of 1920-1… the inability of the warlords to move food and their diversion of relief supplies to their own armies caused more suffering than the drought itself."[17] Nor have Chinese scholars in the People's Republic paid much attention to the humanitarian exertions of previous Chinese regimes, focusing instead, in the case of 1920-21, on missionary and international efforts.[18]

More recent contributions to the literature on modern Chinese disaster relief identified periods of native relief advances that at least bookend the 1920s warlord period, starting with the efforts of late Qing reformers in the 1870s – largely lower-Yangzi elites acting in tandem with missionaries to relieve massive drought famine in the poorer North – and then a re-invigorated 1930s relief culture under the Nationalists and the flowering of more permanent relief agents

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[16] Andrew Nathan, *Peking Politics, 1918-1923: Factionalism and the Failure of Constitutionalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 68. Other works from the same period include Hsi-Sheng Ch'i, *Warlord Politics in China, 1916-1928* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976). Gavan McCormack, *Chang Tso-lin in Northeast China, 1911-1928* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977).

[17] Alvyn J. Austin, *Saving China: Canadian Missionaries in the Middle Kingdom, 1888-1959* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 193. Margo Gewurtz promptly followed with a paper on the Henan section of the 1920-21 famine devoted to "Missionaries and famine relief." Margo S. Gewurtz, "Famine Relief in China: North Henan in the 1920s," Working Paper Series No. 50 (Toronto: University of Toronto-York University Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies, June 1987). An academic biography from the 1970s determined that its missionary subject in the 1910s and 1920s took "an active role in famine relief injecting a dynamic sense of urgency into the apathetic efforts of local officialdom," based exclusively on missionary diaries and correspondence. Lewis C. Walmsley, *Bishop in Honan: Mission and Museum in the Life of William C. White* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 120, 130. A more recent study examines the exertions of Canadian missionaries during famine in war-wracked Henan in the 1940s. Erleen J. Christensen, *In War and Famine: Missionaries in China's Honan Province in the 1940s* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2005).

[18] Su Xinliu, *Minguo shiqi Henan shui han zaihai yu xiangcun shehui* (Rural Henan society amid flood and drought disasters during the Republican era) (Zhengzhou: Huanghe shuili chuban she, 2004), 176-8. Xia Mingfang and Kang Peizhu, ed., *20 shiji Zhongguo zaibian tushi* (A history of natural disasters in twentieth century China) (Fuzhou: Fujian jiayu chuban she, 2001), 59-80. The section on 1920 in the latter work is a revised version of a chapter in Li Wenhai, Xia Mingfang, et al., *Zhongguo jindai shi da zaihuang* (Ten major disasters of modern China) (Shanghai: Renmin chuban she, 1994), 135-67. One exception to this emphasis on the international effort in 1920-21 is a Shandong Normal University study by Chen Ling, which makes a good effort to balance relief activity by the Beiyang regime with those of the international societies. Chen Ling, "1920 nian Huabei wusheng hanzai yu zhenwu yanjiu" (Relief of the five-province drought famine in 1920 north China) (Master's thesis, Shandong shifan daxue, 2006).

such as the Chinese Red Cross.[19] But 1920-21 remains in the shadows. Lillian Li's recent *Fighting Famine in North China*, while an important work on the *longue durée* of the subject, offers the same relief total of $37 million in her section on 1920-21, stressing the international dimension and noting the same 3:2 Chinese-foreign ratio of overall relief contributions.[20] In short, our understanding of Chinese responses to famine in the early Republic is still derived from the determinations of the Western missionary-diplomatic community in 1922, which, as we will see, produced little more than well-publicized guesswork on the extent of indigenous relief activity around them. The implications for our understanding of China as a whole in this period – its rural communities, urban civil society, the warlords themselves – are serious and far-reaching.

In a recent volume on the social networks and attendant philanthropies of Republican Shanghai, Wen-hsin Yeh has noted that "Most existing social science scholarship has focused primarily on traditional Chinese networks – particularistic ties that stemmed from kinship, native place origins, and guilds." Significantly, the reverse appears to be the case in the study of the North where, if anywhere, research has focused on the social activism of well-documented associations springing from what Yeh calls the "new-styles of networking… the YMCA, the Red Cross, the Bankers Association, the Chamber of Commerce," along with missionary and international efforts.[21] In the case of the one northern benevolence hall through the late Qing and

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[19] Edgerton-Tarpley, *Tears from Iron*. Roberta Wue, "The Profits of Philanthropy: Relief Aid, *Shenbao*, and the Art World in Later Nineteenth Century Shanghai," *Late Imperial China*, 25, no.1 (2004), 187-211. Mary Backus Rankin, *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China: Zhejiang Province, 1865-1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986). Studies on Republican-era charity relief by Chinese are often heavily weighted toward southern China and/or to the Nationalist period; see Nara Dillon, "The Politics of Philanthropy: Social Networks and Refugee Relief in Shanghai, 1932-1949," in Nara Dillon and Jean C. Oi, eds., *At the Crossroads of Empires: Middlemen, Social Networks, and State-Building in Republican Shanghai* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 179-205. Paul Katz, "'It is Difficult to be Indifferent to One's Roots': Taizhou Sojourners and Flood Relief during the 1920s," *Journal of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica* 54 (2006).

[20] Li relies on the 1922 Peking committee report for 29 of her 40 relevant citations. Li, *Fighting Famine*, 297, 467.

[21] Wen-Hsin Yeh, "Huang Yanpei and the Chinese Society of Vocational Education in Shanghai Networking," in Dillon and Oi, eds., *At the Crossroads of Empires*, 27. Examples include Shirley S. Garrett, *Social Reformers in Urban China: the Chinese Y.M.C.A., 1895-1926* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970). Caroline, "The Power of Mercy: the Chinese Red Cross Society, 1900-1937" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1998. Brett

Republic of which we do have studies – by both Ruth Rogaski and Vivienne Shue on Tianjin's Hall for Spreading Benevolence (Guangrentang) – we find that the institution was not properly northern at all, instead founded in 1878 at the height of famine in the North by the northern treaty port's "prominent Anhui, Jiangsu and Zhejiang" sojourners who, in Shue's words, "shared a sense of moral repugnance as they beheld what they tended to regard as the slovenly inefficiency, the incivility, and the often cruel depravity endured, during the latter half of the nineteenth century, by the ragged people of the poor and disaster-prone North."[22]

Why is this important? Famine, in peacetime, is a predominantly *rural* experience, and yet north China famines have been treated in the literature predominantly from the perspective of the central state or elite Chinese outsiders, not residents of stricken rural northern communities themselves. In other words, current histories neglect the traditional village-level methods of mutual-aid employed by rural north Chinese in varying degrees of intensity and success over the modern period, producing a narrow, limited interpretation of Chinese humanitarianism through the prism of state interests (in maintaining social order and a productive tax/rent-paying agricultural population) and the nation-building project (among segments of China's mostly urban and coastal population responding to the foreign military, commercial and missionary presence).

To get a sense of where the literature stands on this larger subject of Chinese humanitarianism, we might break down its study over the centuries into two rough categories. On charity, or *cishan*, specifically *institutionalized* charity, we have groundbreaking studies by Fuma Susumu, Liang Qizi and Joanna Handlin Smith, yet their excellent works focus on the

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Sheehan, *Trust in Troubled Times: Money, banks and state-society relations in Republican Tianjin* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003). Ren Yunlan, "Lun Huabei zaihuang qijian Tianjinshanghuide zhenji huodong, 1903-1936" (On the relief measures of the Tianjin chamber of commerce during natural calamity in north China), *Shixue yuekan* 4 (2006), 104-9.

[22] Shue, "The Quality of Mercy," 416-7.

prosperous lower Yangzi under the Ming and Qing (a fact doubtless due to the disproportionate number of diary and gazetteer-penning literati that region produced over the centuries).[23] On disaster relief, or *zhenji* (a heightened form of annual *dongzhen*, or winter relief), we have equally important work by Kathryn Edgerton-Tarpley, Lillian Li, and Pierre-Étienne Will, particularly on state measures (and failures) in the northern provinces of Zhili and Shanxi.[24]

When we consider *yizhen*, however, that is "charity relief," or informal household, temple and associational efforts coming and going with humanitarian crises, we find a phenomenon as fleeting as it is understudied, especially in the case of the North.[25] Out of this veritable blackhole on non-state, non-institutional north China disaster relief has come a troubling but persisting narrative: that from the heights of eighteenth-century High Qing state relief, the North suffered a one-dimensional downward spiral of humanitarian neglect congruent with dynastic decline, a vacuum ripe for outside intervention in the form of foreign aid and charity relief from the more "modern" and prosperous region of greater Shanghai. If, however, upon closer scrutiny, we can identify alternative *northern* relief legacies running into the troubled Republic, ones that, by their localized, spontaneous and largely informal natures, were so readily lost in the shuffle of later histories, we would raise questions beyond the study of disaster relief itself to questions on social relations and the limits of dynastic decline. If people were able to mobilize effective relief over long distances during this period of warlordism, we also need to rethink the degree to which the

[23] This southern emphasis by Chinese scholarship is examined in Zhang Lifan, "Jinshinianlai guonei mingqing shehui jiuji yanjiu zongshu" (A Summary of the past ten years' domestic research on Ming-Qing social relief), *Lishi jiaoxue wenti*, 5 (2006), 85-9. Joanna Handlin Smith, *The Art of Doing Good: Charity in Late Ming China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 1. Fuma Susumu, *Zhongguo shanhui citing shi yanjiu* (A history of Chinese charities and benevolence halls) (Beijing: Shangwu yinshu guan, 2005). Liang Qizi (Angela Leung), *Shishan yu jiaohua: Ming Qingde cishan zuzhi* (Dispensing charity and culture: philantropic organization in the Ming and Qing) (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chuban she, 2001).

[24] Edgerton-Tarpley, *Tears from Iron*. Li, *Fighting Famine*. Pierre-Étienne Will, *Bureaucracy and Famine in Eighteenth-Century China*, trans. Elborg Forster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

[25] Both Edgerton-Tarpley and Li identify a surge in relief organization among lower-Yangzi elites and its projection into the North. For a recent Chinese example of this narrative, see Zhu Hu, *Difangxing liudong ji qi chaoyue: Wan Qing yizhen yu jindai Zhongguo de xinchen daixie* (Localist circulation and its transcendence: Late-Qing charity relief and modern China's supersession of the old by the new) (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2006).

era really represented the nadir of Chinese society. And then any number of late Qing and Republican crises – if not the larger subject of Chinese humanitarianism in the modern period – would need to be reconsidered.

1920-21 revisited

Some of the telltale technological and organizational phenomena of the 20th century were indeed present in relief operations in 1920, lending – in hindsight – a more familiar, "modern" flavor to what was then the greatest humanitarian crisis of the Chinese Republic. Trains had penetrated further into China's interior, most notably a rail line running through the mountains west from Shijiazhuang in Zhili to the capital of Shanxi, which had been worst-hit of all provinces in the 1870s; meanwhile, opium's supplanting of food-crop production was not the problem it had been in the 1870s, according to British intelligence, which credited the vigilance of local magistrates.[26] In the 1870s, woodblock prints of suicide and cannibalism in north China commissioned by philanthropists in greater Shanghai had piqued the hearts of donors as far away as Britain. In 1920, professional advertisers in the form of the Advertising Club of China submitted "proposals along publicity lines" to a relief committee "so as to put an appeal out more effectually before the public," and photographic exhibitions of the famine field made an autumn tour of Beijing in order to "press the public for donations" to charity.[27] Twenty-four motorcar dealers in Beijing gave use of vehicles for fundraising purposes in the fall of 1920 while an international relief society was reportedly in the process of securing the use of four airplanes

[26] "The whole province of Shansi is free from the growth of poppy," an informant wrote the British consul in Tianjin. "It would be hopeless for anyone to try and grow [poppy] anywhere around here," another seconded from south Zhili, "as through the total lack of rain, no crops are growing of any kind," adding that the magistrate had destroyed the few local attempts at poppy growth. Secretary of the International Anti-Narcotic Association of China, Shansi Branch, to Ker, 10 May 1920, FO 674/232. "Tientsin: 1920: Dossier 13: Opium Narcotics" Meech to Ker, letter, 3 May 1920, FO 674/232.

[27] *The Graphic: an illustrated weekly magazine* (London), 6 July 1878. Edgerton-Tarpley, *Tears from Iron*, 2. *Xiao gongbao*, 8 Oct. 1920.

from a government agency to send relief to the zone. A Shanghai car dealer meanwhile furnished seven specialized "Ford famine cars" for relief operations, sending them "into many localities where a motor car never before has been seen."[28] With "the largest foreign tobacco company in China" using twenty-five storytellers "skillfully stationed at boat landings" and "carefully coached by Chinese employees" to put product plugs in their acts, multinationals were evidently borrowing from traditional Chinese cultural repertoires to reach China's multitudes in the Republic; in 1920 both Standard Oil and the British-American Tobacco Company would also complement gentry and official relief efforts in parts of the 1920-21 famine zone with "self-financed and self-executed" food relief through their own networks of inland agents. And cities as far flung as Canton (Guangzhou) in the south, Wuhan on the Yangzi, and Mukden (Shenyang) in Manchuria, saw uniformed Chinese Boy Scouts drumming up donations in the streets for the relief of their famished countrymen on the north China plain.[29]

But as we delve below into the famine experience of 1920-21 we should be cautioned against fixating on such signs of modernity and the "New China." Chinese society was too layered and fractured in this period of great transition – culturally, socially, and politically – for any single mode of life or emerging segment of society to justify taking the limelight in our narrative. The task of feeding mouths and clothing bodies in over 90,000 square miles of parched earth (about the combined size of Pennsylvania and New York) aroused a social response in a remarkable complexity of forms using a broad spectrum of traditional and "modern" methods.

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[28] *Celestial Empire*, 27 Nov. 1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 18 Dec. 1920. *Celestial Empire*, 19 March 1921. *Minyi ribao*, 28 Oct. 1920.

[29] J. W. Sanger, "Advertising Methods in Japan, China and the Philippines," in *Special Agents Series No. 209*, U.S. Department of Commerce (Washington: Government Printing office, 1921), 77. Eleanor Franklin Egan, "Fighting the Chinese Famine," *The Saturday Evening Post*, 9 April 1921, 46. *Shengjing shibao*, 14 Oct. 1920. *Hankou zhongxi bao*, 8 Dec. 1920. *Celestial Empire*, 5 March 1921.

This study makes the case that loss of life was kept at a minimum in 1920 because substantial amounts of official and native private relief flowed in parallel social channels to those used by the celebrated international societies. The latter – widely visible, thus dominating histories of the event – dispatched assistance to the hinterland through missionary networks and those of new and high-profile civic organizations, groups that in turn reassured donors worldwide of proper management and accounting through self-published reports[30] and those appearing in the proliferating media organs of urban society. Other, more purely native groups were run largely on personal acquaintance and trust and – finding their way most readily into gazetteer biographies or the local news briefs of small dailies – drew resources into afflicted communities and received refugees in neighboring ones through customary nodes of civic networking: native-place associations, monastic networks, local gentry and merchant circles or convening friends and colleagues. The skewed, treaty port-based version of events as it exists today in the slim scholarly treatments of the great north China famine of 1920-21 is then largely a function of a disparity in paper production. This has resulted in, at best, half the story being told.

Appearing in a socially and culturally transitional period of the post-Qing Republic, some of these underexplored spheres of relief activity were peculiar to the Republican era, such as the syncretic religious groups dubbed "redemptive societies" by historian Prasenjit Duara[31] and lay Buddhist groups operating along monastic networks and the factionalized but notably coordinated state apparatus that dispatched refugees by the million by train to distant parts of Inner Mongolia and Manchuria. Other spheres of activity stretched back well into the late imperial period; namely,

[30] These include the above 1922 report by the Peking Committee; Stuart Fuller and M. T. Liang, eds., "Statement of Aims and Report on Famine Conditions and How They Are Being Met with Map of the Famine Region" (Tianjin: North China International Society for Famine Relief cooperating with the Chinese-Foreign Relief Committee, Shanghai, Tientsin Press, 1920); and John Earl Baker, ed., "Report of the China Famine Relief, American Red Cross, October 1920 – September, 1921," (Shanghai, 1921?).

[31] Prasenjit Duara, "Of Authenticity and Woman: Personal Narratives of Middle-Class Women in Modern China," in Wen-hsin Yeh, ed., *Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 342-3.

local efforts rising organically from communities drawing from an indigenous north Chinese legacy of charity relief. As we will see, the vast majority of relief contributions by the joint-foreign Chinese "international" community did not arrive in the interior until late in the winter of 1921. If native networks and stricken communities themselves had not carried their own through the seven or so months of crop failure before the international effort fully mobilized, and if warlord politicians had not facilitated the free movement of relief resources and refugees, then the fates of untold numbers of the starving would never have even made it into the hands of the international community in the spring of 1921.

This study endeavors, then, to present an alternative understanding of disaster response in modern China. First, by expanding study of modern north China famine relief beyond the imperial and modern state apparatus one can identify a paternalistic relief culture shared by state and extragovernmental actors in the countryside that operated at multiple levels simultaneously and that persisted despite the increased marginalization of China's interior. To those engaged in relief, it did not appear to matter whether poor or disaster relief was carried out by the state or by residents acting in a private capacity or by a combination of both. What mattered was that it got done.

This would make a broader intervention in the study of modern Chinese history, first by complicating the notion of dynastic decline – that is, the collapse of the late imperial Confucian system amid foreign and internal pressures – tracing, instead, continuities between Ming and Qing relief administration and much of what transpired across the 1920-21 famine field. The continued viability of the administrative command structure down to the county level, along with the surprisingly competent stewardship of available relief infrastructure by the central and provincial military leaderships, suggest that, five years after the death of President Yuan Shikai

in 1916, warlord politicians had not yet preoccupied themselves with the all-out scramble for political supremacy that characterized the coming decade of internecine fighting (followed by the social disruptions of the 1928 Nationalist assault on the North, civil war with the Communists, and the Japanese invasion, all amid severe ecological crises).

The 1920s destruction of the social fabric of traditional northern communities – mutual aid within clans or among poor owner-cultivators together with a customary, if unreliable, paternalism practiced by local elites – appears to have followed the same rough timeline as the descent into war: only in the mid-1920s did local elites abandon positions of local leadership, if not the countryside altogether, in significant numbers, ushering in a new, and ultimately caustic, rural social dynamic characterized by absentee landlordism and predatory agents of an increasingly extractive state apparatus, which, when not devoting revenue to foreign debt payments or military expenses, privileged the industry, infrastructure, and security of China's coastal centers at the expense of its marginalized interior. Not till the intensified state extractions from society in the mid-1920s amid the spiral of violence, the tearing of the social fabric as rural elites fled to the cities, and the requisitioning of trains and carts for the provisioning of armies, did north China see mass famine on the scale of the 1870s again – specifically in 1928-30 when remote Gansu, Shaanxi and the Mongolian steppes were hit by consecutive years of drought.[32]

Finally, it might be mentioned that modern famines are the slow, silent kin of warfare, dislocating and dispossessing communities by varying degree and scope, while often prompting the mobilization of enormous human and material resources by state and private sources, usually internationally. They are likewise complex animals to dissect, stretching over vast terrain involving, in this case, tens of millions of people in rural and urban China and many others

[32] On heightened exactions from the populace by provincial governments in the 1920s, see Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State*, 67-71.

sending in relief from overseas. Still, despite this kinship to its manmade cousin, famine has no clear villain, and it kills slowly and silently, mostly rural, peripheral, poor populations. Famine victims also need to be "rescued" by others every day of the crisis until they can feed themselves or their families again on their own; in other words, the acts that sustain famine victims through many months, if not years, of crisis are innumerable, and their weakest link – a few days without food, or shelter, or layers of clothing, somewhere along the line – renders all efforts up to that point in vain. The fact that famines, despite their enormity and horror, get, in the best cases, hardly a fraction of the historiographical attention given to warfare, makes their exploration all the more challenging.

This study, of course, has its limitations. This is not a study of the causes of poverty, the social effects of famine, or poverty alleviation and its methods and ideologies, all of which are worthy subjects but would be too ambitious to attempt to handle thoroughly here. Neither does this study explore the root causes of food crises, which have been capably dealt with by other historians, nor any patterns in the severity of the famine or successes of its relief by geography. The sources for 1920-21, as they stand, simply do not offer enough evidence to support any such conclusions. And while focusing on one or two particular areas of the North for which evidence might be relatively plentiful would have led to a regional study of a far more detailed nature, it would have offered no way of knowing whether the chosen locale was representative of the famine zone as a whole or was an aberration.

Instead, this study attempts to piece together as broad a picture of the famine as a variety of available sources allow, while approaching one of modern China's greatest humanitarian challenges as both an institutional study and a street-level social history. It seeks to take advantage of unused or underused sources, such as periodicals put out by various relief agencies

devoted exclusively to famine relief in 1920-21, as well as county gazetteers from the 1980s and 1990s, while attempting a more systematic combing of the biographical sections of county gazetteers from the Republican era and of big city newspapers already used by historians, as well as dozens of others so far largely ignored. At the same time, part of the argument set forth here contends that certain kinds of relief are likely to be under-counted no matter what kind of sources are uncovered: such as grain shipped by cart or raft instead of by train or funds raised by local people or by stricken communities themselves. At its most basic level, this study is about how people were kept alive, that is, on the social mechanics of famine relief in the early Republic. In the meantime, it endeavors to provide, when possible, a structure and chronological play by play of events over the crisis year. Revisited in each chapter will be a simple but perplexing question: Why did so many fewer people die in 1920-21 than might have been expected considering the severity and vastness of the harvest failure across five provinces in the North? And what does this tell us about Chinese social life at this pivotal point in the country's modern period?

Chapter one breaks down the various social circles in Beijing responding to the famine in the fall of 1920 before sketching China's news media that year, which both informed the urban public of the rural crisis and also shaped subsequent histories incorporating the event. Active at the outset of the relief effort, as we will see here or in subsequent chapters, were groups as varied as native-place associations and benevolence halls; county, prefecture or province-wide relief groups; syncretic religious groups new to the Republic (or "redemptive societies"); native relief efforts formed along professional or confessional lines, such as societies composed of police, railroad officials or Buddhist laymen; formal central state and provincial relief organs; major companies like Nanyang Bros. Tobacco Co. and smaller businesses like pharmacies, car dealerships, and bathhouses; international societies composed of foreign residents and prominent

Chinese; and individual merchant-gentry or other members of society. This chapter also proposes that focusing on the poor showing of formal, top level relief institutions in 1920-21, at least compared to what had existed under previous Qing administrations, would not provide a complete accounting of the state's role in 1920-21 since official relief operations coincided with the appearance of a different dimension of state relief. Quasi-governmental societies operated with parallel and less formal administrations to official organs like the Government Relief Bureau. In some cases, these groups were manned by officials from state ministries or military arms of the government and were initiated, it seems, very much in the fashion of an office pool before growing into formidable relief machines reaching along native-place and other social networks into the stricken interior. This chapter ends with a case study of one stricken rural Zhili county, Wan (today's Shunping), in order to show how the chronology of state and charitable intervention in the county food supply roughly matched late imperial precedents. Finally, this chapter brings in the important but problematic source of county gazetteers, while using them to begin drawing continuities between local famine relief activity under the Qing with what we see here in the early Republic.

Chapter two is devoted to the famine field; it first focuses on Cang, a large rural county in Zhili (today's Hebei), before continuing on to Shanxi's largest county, Pingding, and eight contiguous Zhili counties forming a belt across the north China plain up to the border with Shandong. The aim of this tour – across mountains and plains, and remote and more easily-accessed locations – is to piece together what can be gleaned from extant sources on both incoming relief and relief at the village and county levels in 1920-21. This chapter will make the case that, especially when dealing with remote communities spread over such vast terrain far from the spotlight provided by the new media on cities like Shanghai and Tianjin, silence in the sources

should not be construed as inactivity on the ground in 1920-21. Available evidence points to village-level grain handout programs and county-level soup kitchen activity in rural Zhili, Shanxi and elsewhere operating independently from missionary or urban relief society contributions, and, no less, in both moderately and hard-hit sections of the drought zone. The second goal of this chapter is to use county histories to explore the Qing era relief precedents set by villagers in these same afflicted counties in order to draw continuities with the late imperial period. Third, through the prism of a major humanitarian crisis, this chapter explores the surprising level of coordination of the administrative command structure in 1920-21 from the main arms of the central government – most notably the Interior Ministry and Ministry of Communications – down to the provincial, county and village level. Despite the fall of a dynasty and the country's spiral into political instability and war, communities in the increasingly neglected periphery of 1920 north China appear here significantly more viable and attentive to social welfare needs than previously recognized, while demonstrating a surprising continuity with late imperial relief traditions. Finally, this chapter endeavors to step away from the scholarly attention to central state action in north China by bringing other segments of rural society into the orbit of relief study, something that has been done in studies of Jiangnan in the area of Shanghai, but much less so in studies of the North.

Chapter three takes us to the Beijing metropolitan region in order to detail poor relief for city residents in 1920-21 and the reception of refugees by authorities, charities, and individual relief actors. While we have a comprehensive urban study of Beijing under the Ming and Qing by Susan Naquin, and while David Strand and Madeleine Yue Dong have produced important works on the political and cultural dimensions, respectively, of Republican Beijing, little has been written on state or charitable poor relief specifically in China's capital in the turbulent 1920s. Janet Chen's more recent work on policy toward China's urban poor in the first half of the 20th century focuses

on what she correctly calls the "criminalization of poverty" by certain elite segments of society, but it does not capture the wider range of poor relief occurring, at least, in a major northern city like Beijing circa 1920.[33] As anthropologist Myron Cohen has pointed out, late imperial China was marked by fluid social and cultural relationships between urban and rural society.[34] While Beijing was a major center of media production in the early Republic, producing over a hundred daily newspapers in 1920,[35] China's capital also retained a pre-industrial character compared to its treaty-port counterpart of Tianjin, and, as this chapter suggests, there is no *cultural* reason at least why the flurry of relief activity reported in the pages of its news dailies in 1920-21, less than a decade after the fall of the Qing, could not have been replicated in smaller cities and rural communities in the region, places without the spotlight of the modern press. This chapters aims then to provide an intense snapshot of poor relief in Beijing over a nine-month stretch in 1920-21 by getting behind the walls of grain discount (*pingtiao*) centers and soup kitchens and onto street corners and front-stoops where substantial amounts relief items – grain, coppers, and winter clothing – changed hands over the year from both obvious and less expected sources. It also seeks to put personalities behind the city's charities and municipal offices, detailing the operation of the capital gendarmerie and of the *Wushanshe* and *Wowotouhui*, a "redemptive society" and poor relief group, respectively, as they cobbled together relief monies at the city's theaters and other recreational spots. This chapter also explores the degree to which warlords devoted resources and energies to social welfare measures in 1920-21 by revealing the fact that military figures were in

[33] Susan Naquin, *Peking: Temples and City Life, 1400-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). David Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing: City People and Politics in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). Madeleine Yue Dong, *Republican Beijing: The City and Its Histories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). Janet Yi-chun Chen, "Guilty of Indigence: the urban poor in China, 1900-1949" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2005).
[34] Myron Cohen, "Cultural and Political Inventions in Modern China: The case of the Chinese "peasant," *Daedalus*, Vol. 122, No. 2 (Spring 1993), 161.
[35] Beijing shi difang zhi bianzuan weiyuan hui, *Beijing zhi: baoye, tongxun she xhi* (Gazetteer of Beijing: Newspapers and Communications) (Beijing: Beijing chuban she, 2005), 42-53.

fact behind the founding and management of some of the most active charities and state relief organs in the city. Active members of the warlord establishment displayed a paternalistic policy shown previously by Qing officials, suggesting that, at least in the early part of the Republic, military figures such as Wang Huaiqing heading the Beijing metropolitan garrison, Jiang Yucheng heading the yellow bannermen garrison while running the *Wushanshe*, and Zhang Zuolin sending in relief grain to the capital from the Northeastern provinces, appeared to be both conscious and capable carriers of earlier relief traditions, while in some areas, such as garment-distribution, exceeding even the High Qing. Finally, this chapter touches on the fact that women, and children, comprised a large majority of recipients of state aid in 1920-21 Beijing, one disproportionate to their smaller share of the city's population, adding a gendered dimension to the paternalistic policy of municipal authorities, which is a big change from the Qing.

Chapter four follows the refugee routes to Hankou on the Yangzi, to Kalgan by the Great Wall, to Tianjin, and, mostly, to Manchuria, China's Northeast, by boat, train and foot in order to explore both the official and charitable reception of refugees in greener parts of the country and the mobilization of relief for the famine zone by these same far-flung communities. The movement of 20th century war refugees in China, particularly in the area of Shanghai during the Sino-Japanese war, have received considerably more scholarly attention than migrants away from famine, an absence from the historiography this chapter intends to begin filling in.[36] The chapter also goes beyond the main northeastern urban centers of Mudken (Shenyang), Changchun and Harbin to the rural counties in between, where local authorities appeared to take in refugees according to a quota system set by Zhang Zuolin, superintendent of Manchuria's three provinces, suggesting a

[36] Janet Yi-chun Chen, "The Refugee Crisis in the Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1945," chapter four of "Guilty of Indigence," 166-226. Micah S. Muscolino, "Refugees, Land Reclamation, and Militarized Landscapes in Wartime China: Huanglongshan, Shaanxi, 1937-45," *Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 69, No. 2 (May) 2010, 453-478. R. Keith Schoppa, "Confronting the Refugee Crisis in Zhejiang, 1937-45," paper presented at the 125th Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association (Boston), January 6, 2011.

surprising level of coordination in this politically fractured period between the provincial leaderships of the northeastern breadbasket of Manchuria, their subordinates in the political command structure, and rival authorities in charge of Beijing and Zhili. Lastly, while limited to the use of several key regional news sources, this chapter seeks to sketch the various ways relief monies were mobilized in the Northeast, from deductions from police and other official salaries and apparently-mandated mobilization of grain by rural counties to theatrical fundraisers and not-purely voluntary donations by households in urban districts made according to police lists of their "ability" to contribute.

Chapter five sets out to widen the picture of the 1920 famine and place it in a larger diplomatic and fiscal political context. Covering the period of return for refugees to their home districts in late winter and spring, it starts with the Beiyang regime, which, in control of China's cash-strapped central government, nonetheless served as facilitator, and sponsor, of grain movement over its railways throughout the crisis while, at the same time, navigating the diplomatic obstacles standing in the way of raising customs revenue for famine relief. Afterwards this chapter sketches the relatively orderly mid-winter refugee return to home districts from Zhangjiakou and Tianjin, before offering a run-through of a program to settle the outer reaches of Heilongjiang near Siberia with several hundred thousand refugee-colonists launched by central and provincial authorities in January. Finally, it seeks to shed light on various aspects of the foreign relief interventions during the famine, examining in turn each of its three main forms: a relief depot in central Zhili run by Tianjin's international society; the missionaries, whose prominent voices at the time despite their insular perspective led to a distorted understanding of social relief in the interior; and the American Red Cross, the largest purely foreign relief operation in China that year whose exclusive focus on work relief – seen,

quite wrongly, as a reformist "modern" intervention by Westerners to prevent the very conditions that allowed for flood or drought famine – acted as another set of blinders on foreigners to what the Chinese were in fact achieving in their midst.

Chapter six walks the reader through diagnostic works on "the Chinese character" available to foreign residents of China in the 1920s, including missionary tracts and the works of three major European literary figures in the country in 1920-21, St.-John Perse, Somerset Maugham, and Bertrand Russell. While in much of this Western output one can identify, ironically, a *yin*/*yang*-style dichotomy of an energetic, dynamic West held up against a slothful, static East, this chapter also argues that in this watershed moment of Chinese cultural life, such views were in fact hegemonic, shared by Western and Chinese intellectuals alike trying to account for China's sorry state in all areas economic, political and military in the modern period. In the meantime, this chapter contrasts the criticisms of Chinese charity coming from Protestant and Catholic missionaries in the field, revealing tensions within Western religious traditions more than any "truths" on the nature of Chinese society. Ultimately, this chapter argues that the emphasis on Western relief initiative and Chinese corruption in scholarship on the 1920-21 famine is more a product of the crisis's original discursive climate than events on the ground over the year. It is then in some sense an epistemological exercise, following the turn-of-the-century paper trail of ideas that contributed to the formation of particular perceptions of a people, however disconnected from social realities.

Measurements & rations

Finally, a word on grain measurements and relief rations. Weights, measures and currency still varied tremendously in Republican China, and not only from one region to another

but within cities as well. "On the west side of Peking one sheng equals one cattie (1.33 pounds)," Sidney Gamble pointed out in 1919, for example, "while in the East City one sheng weighs 1.5 catties."[37] Meanwhile, a *shi* (stone) cited in one press report might contain 120 *jin*, while one appearing in another might contain 160 *jin*, or anywhere in between, and news sources very rarely specified which. Grain amounts throughout this study then should be considered as an approximation.

The Ministry of Communications, which ran the railways over which much of the country's agricultural production moved, standardized measurements somewhat in its published accounting records as follows. While a *shi* was primarily a measurement of volume in 1920-21 granary records, it was used as a weight measure on the books of the ministry. The three grain measurements most often used in the ministry's relief accounting over the course of the crisis were *jin* (catty, approximately 600 grams), *shi* (as weight this most commonly corresponded to 120 *jin*, although *shi* could be as much as 160 *jin*), and *dun* (ton, which converted at 1,680 *jin*, according to stipulations issued by the ministry in December 1920).[38] To simplify matters for the reader, I have converted grain amounts in this study into *jin* – or a little over a pound in weight – whenever possible.

Each *jin* of millet, *gaoliang* (sorghum) or wheat, meanwhile, provided roughly two adult daily famine rations of roughly 1,000-1,250 calories each, enough to maintain an average relief recipient, according to the American Red Cross in 1920-21. In other words, for any total amount of relief grain rendered in *jin* throughout this study, double the amount to arrive at an estimate of

[37] Sidney D. Gamble, *Peking: a Social Survey: Conducted under the Auspices of the Princeton University Center in China and the Peking Young Men's Christian Association* (New York: George H. Doran, 1921), 278.
[38] *Da gongbao*, 19 Dec. 1920. *Zhengfu gongbao*, 13 June 1921.

the number of adults it could feed for a day – at bare famine ration levels with minimal to no physical activity.[39]

[39] "The daily rations allocated in the monthly distributions were standardized [under the Qing] after a text of 1740, which fixed them at a half *sheng*, or 0.005 *shi* of 'grain' (*mi*) per day per adult and half as much for children," Pierre-Étienne Will writes. "The typical ration of one-half *sheng* per day would represent, then, 420 grams of bleached rice, just barely a survival ration, for at about 3,300 kilocalories per kilogram [or 1,980 calories per *jin*], 420 grams provides less than 1,400 kilocalories." Lillian Li writes that in 1920 "medical experts said that 8 ounces of millet (about half a catty) or of *gaoliang* was sufficient as a daily ration." The American Red Cross estimated the average caloric value of these grains in 1920 to be in the area of 2,000-2,500 per catty (*jin*), slightly more than Will's estimate above. Will, *Bureaucracy and Famine*, 131-2. Li, *Fighting Famine*, 300. Baker, ed., "Report," 222.

Chapter One

The Outset: social mobilization, media, and relief in the fall of 1920

In the middle of October 1920, a spell of rain in the drought epicenter of south Zhili gave rise to a last-ditch effort to sow seeds for the spring harvest, an episode that the *Times* correspondent captured for his readers across the world in London. "Several soaking rains" had recently fallen on a countryside where "only the hardier weeds" had survived a rainless twelve months, transforming the "whole aspect of the country, psychologically as well as physically…The fields again show green." "In every corner and by every farmer" the last few "bits of clothes" and "sticks of furniture," even children, had been shed for the cash needed to buy seed, readers in London learned, and "wheat has been planted, and it is coming up gloriously." "But it is a forlorn, long-distant hope," the correspondent cautioned. There were seven months to go before the wheat ripened. "The harrowing problem will be to live until June." To an early 20th century *Times* readership, it was a familiar Chinese scene: farmers who were scrambling in a desperate bid to sow crops for the spring were simply on their own, without so much as an extended hand from their countrymen, while, we learn, the province's military leadership in the form of "Tsao Kun, Governor of the Province" and "other generalisimi [were] swagger[ing]" with "untold numbers of troops," clogging the vital rail lines from grain-rich parts of the country.[1]

But not an insignificant share of this wheat seed planted by these desperate farmers had in fact been distributed free by a Chinese aid group – the Shunzhi relief society – whose seed program would have been known to the readers of any number of Chinese news dailies that same

[1] "Famine in China – Starvation, Cholera, and Bandits – Children Sold for a Few Shillings," *The Times* (London), 27 Nov 1920. The report was mailed from China on October 9, 1920.

month. By the middle of October, counties in Daming Prefecture in Zhili's extreme south and other nearby prefectures including Shen, Ji and Baoding – a total of 50 counties – had seen the distribution of $20,000-worth of wheat seed, and the society was reportedly poised to distribute an additional 2,000 *shi* secured with another $20,000, enough to seed an estimated 1,280,000 *mu* of land.[2] More, a month earlier, readers of newspapers across China would have learned that the founding leadership of this aid group was almost exclusively composed of natives of rural Zhili counties serving in military and official posts in the capital, some of the very men the *Times* correspondent had "swaggering" about as farmers in south Zhili struggled to secure seed. To British readers, then, no native relief structure existed at the outset of famine in 1920 – "Chinese Resigned to Starvation – Death the Only Prospect" ran the headline of another *Times* dispatch that autumn – let alone one composed of members of the capital's maligned ruling establishment whose group had the distinction of being the first charity effort to reach over half of Zhili's 97 afflicted counties.[3]

The Shunzhi relief society was one of dozens of native aid groups that formed in the Chinese capital and across the country at the outset of famine in 1920-21. This chapter aims to capture the multiple layers of social response and relief mobilization needed to explain, here and in subsequent chapters, why so many fewer people died than might have been expected after widespread harvest failure in the fall, while providing some legibility to the various social

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[2] The group was known in Chinese as the *Shunzhi hanzai jiuji hui*. Members of a different August 1920 seed relief effort in August 1920 in Zhili estimated that each *jin* of wheat seed was sufficient to sow 2 *mu* of land. At $20,000 for 2,000 *shi*, each *shi* was presumably 160 *jin*. *Shihua*, 15 Oct. 1920, 2. *Shuntian shibao*, 15 Oct. 1920, 7. *Beijing ribao*, 16 Oct. 1920, 3. *Zhongguo minbao*, 4 Aug. 1920.

[3] "There is a detached air of resignation in those who have not had a real meal for weeks that is incomprehensible to one from the West," the second *Times* report reads. "If they have no food they must die. They have no food, therefore they must die. That sums up their whole attitude…. I asked if the Government would help them. That question was received with amusement. I might as well have asked if the moon would help them. Help from the Government was an idea so alien that it had not even occurred to them." *The Times* (London) 16 Nov. 1920. *Shihua*, 9 Sept. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 12 Sept. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 17 Sept. 1920. *Xibei ribao*, 21 Sept. 1920. *Yishi bao*, 11 Sept. 1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 12 Sept. 1920. *Minguo ribao*, 18 Sept. 1920. *Tianjin zhongmei ribao*, 19 Sept. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 18 Sept. 1920. Xu Youchun, *Minguo renwu da cidian* (Biographical dictionary of Republican China) (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chuban she, 2007), 28, 407-8, 109-10, 706, 731, 1377, 1429.

networks active in the capital of the young Republic along which relief flowed. Relief mobilization, as we will see, was not limited to the cosmopolitan circles in which prominent Chinese and the foreign diplomatic, commercial and missionary communities overlapped. Second, this chapter aims to explore the various broadsheets and tabloids sprouting from the country's burgeoning news industry in the period as a way of introducing the main Chinese sources used throughout this study – news dailies, official gazettes like Beijing's *Zhengfu gongbao* and Taiyuan's *Laifu bao*, and periodicals devoted to the famine relief effort like *Jiuzai zhoukan* and *Zhenzai ribao* – many of which have been underused or simply overlooked by historians, both Chinese and Western, investigating this momentous event. Finally, this chapter will sketch how the traditional stages of official and private disaster relief were broken down in the Qing – from grain stabilization efforts (*pingtiao*), to emergency relief (*jizhen*), and final to general relief in the form of soup kitchens and free grain handouts – to show how this basic timeline of disaster relief remained very much in place in Chinese communities over the nine-month crisis of 1920-21.

The foreign presence

Many European and American residents of Zhili were in their summer retreats in August of 1920 when talk of famine was first heard among their servants. With the forces of the so-called Anfu political faction defeated by the Zhili faction in the brief July war east of Beijing, the vacationers could return to the capital unmolested, and $1,000 leftover from a $1,600 foreigner siege provision fund was put into a fund dedicated to famine relief if events came to that, as they quickly would.[4] By mid-September, diplomats and missionaries in China's major cities were forming societies to prepare for the impending famine and the American minister to Beijing,

[4] Eleanor Franklin Egan, "Fighting the Chinese Famine," *The Saturday Evening Post*, 9 April 1921, 46.

Charles Crane, after wiring a desperate appeal to President Woodrow Wilson and the secretary of state in Washington, was forming a united relief committee representing eleven nationalities of the Beijing foreign community. By November, the seven international committees had divided the five-province famine zone between them,[5] and, in addition, a famine relief committee in Shanghai composed of prominent Chinese and foreigners would operate independently in select parts of the famine field.

In the last few days of September 1920, former premier Xiong Xilong had entertained members of the foreign delegations in the capital – British, French, American, and Japanese among them – to his Beijing residence to begin discussion on how to combine Chinese and foreign relief efforts.[6] Within days, on the first of October, representatives of various foreign and Chinese relief organizations filed into the meeting hall (*huiguan*) of the organization of Chinese who had sojourned to Europe and America for their studies, and the Peking United International Famine Relief Committee came into existence.[7] Delegates from a dozen foreign nations formed an executive committee chaired by British legation physician Dr. G. Douglas Gray, a body that in turn worked with a larger administrative council of prominent Chinese, Liang Shiyi and Xiong Xiling among them, making the "international" dimension. Also on the council sat H. C. Emery, representative of the American Advisory Committee, which had just been formed by Crane, a Woodrow Wilson appointee who would assist in the mobilization of millions of famine relief

[5] These were the Peking United International Famine Relief Committee (western Zhili), the North China International Relief Society of Tientsin (eastern Zhili), the American Red Cross (western Shandong), the International Auxiliary of the Shantung Famine Relief Committee of Tsinanfu (non-ARC parts of Shandong), and committees in Kaifeng, Taiyuan and Xi'an covering Henan, Shanxi and Shaanxi provinces, respectively.
[6] *Shuntian shibao*, 30 Sept. 1920.
[7] At this first meeting one local news report recorded twelve unnamed foreign envoys, including those from the United States, Japan, Italy and Belgium, along with the following ten Chinese societies and their representatives: Beisheng Emergency Relief Society (Cheng Yuanshen and Shi Zhaoxiang); North China Famine Relief Society (Xu Shizhang and Liang Shiyi); Chinese Red Cross (Cai Yangan); Zhili Disaster Relief Society (Li Shiwei); Shunzhi Relief Bureau (Liu Ruoceng); Zhili Relief Society (Sun Ziwen); Beiwusheng relief society (Wang Daxie and Xiong Xiling); Buddhist Relief Society (Zhang Xiujue and Liu Xuan); Metropolitan Farmers Relief Society (Qian Baojun); and Beijing Christian Relief Society (Liu Fang). *Xiao gongbao*, 3 Oct. 1920.

dollars across the United States until his departure after the inauguration of Warren Harding in early 1921. This joint-Chinese foreign Peking committee had two roles over the crisis year, running its own relief operations in the western half of Zhili Province (served by the Beijing-Hankou rail line) and acting as a quasi-official data-gathering center on famine conditions across the North and on the operations of international committees in other sections of the five-province disaster zone.

It should be pointed out, though, that the overall numerical presence of foreigners across China during the Republic was miniscule: an October 1920 census taken of the country's greatest concentration of non-Chinese, Shanghai, counted 23,307 residents, almost half of whom were Japanese.[8] If the foreigner loomed large in China, it was institutionally, as foreign advisors and managers had a hand in the operation of several far-reaching fiscal organs of the Chinese state, including the important Maritime Customs Administration. During this period of increasingly fractured government, foreign relief societies would also perform the dual role of extragovernmental relief agent and proxy official record-keeper. Much of the knowledge generated on activity in and around the famine zone in 1920 was a product of select relief organizations with the resources to compile, process and publish data from a vast field of operation. Much of this production was taken up by the handful of foreign, or joint foreign and Chinese "international" relief groups active that year, standardized by book-keeping guidebooks produced expressly for missionaries in the Chinese mission field[9] and the pro bono assistance of certified accountants in Shanghai and other treaty-ports. But these joint Chinese and foreign international committees, whose number paled in comparison to that of purely Chinese groups, will take a back seat in our narrative until the spring when they began in earnest. But before we

[8] *The China Sun*, 20 Nov. 1920.
[9] William I. Lacy, *Book-keeping and Business Practise for Missionaries*, with a foreword by Charles S. Keen of the University of Nanking Department of Missionary Training (Shanghai: Methodist Publishing House, 1920).

turn to these native efforts, we should sketch the parallel informational platforms that help give varying degrees of legibility to the various social circles from which this relief activity sprouted in the fall of 1920.

Consuming the crisis

The famine conditions facing many million residents of north China's interior in 1920-21 was transmitted to China's urban, coastal residents by a burgeoning press. For the purposes of this study, we will be using the term "urban" to denote cities around the country hosting high concentrations of the country's nascent but burgeoning print media, namely, but not exclusively, Beijing, the cities of Manchuria, and the numerous treaty ports. In Beijing alone more than one hundred newspapers were launched in just the years 1919-1921 and, on top of the dozens of news dailies already running in the capital since the establishment of the Republic in 1912, they offered a vibrant collective conversation on local, national and international affairs.[10] Some were business-oriented, others were four or so-page news digests presumably bankrolled by one of the myriad political factions of the day. (In some cases these factions are identifiable, in others they are not.) Much of this legion of print media presumably relied on wire services for their news copy: in one example, half a dozen news dailies ran verbatim the same article on a grain-relief charity in Beijing in September 1920.[11] This heavy use of wire copy aside, consumers of different news sources were presented with markedly different lenses onto the crisis through the editorials, news selection, advertising, and political cartoons of any particular newspaper.[12]

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[10] *Beijing zhi: baoye, tongxun she xhi,* 42-53.

[11] The article appeared on 16 Sept. 1920 in *Chenbao*, *Shihua*, *Xiao gongbao*, *Yishi bao*, and *Zhongguo minbao*, and on the following day in *Shuntian shibao*.

[12] Wire reports were one of the more concrete source of information on relief movement for they consistently detailed a particular volume of relief grain or clothing shipped by a certain relief group, often with names of group members and agents, to a destination in the famine zone. The problem with wire services is they are extremely

The fact that Beijing benevolence halls were dispatching clothes to the famine zone or that members of China's military establishment were active in both the municipal and the charitable accommodation of famine refugees in the capital, as we will see in a later chapter, was far more likely to find its way into Beijing papers with extensive *local* coverage than into larger, more prominent broadsheets aiming for a national scope and readership. In other words, residents of China's coastal cities and inland treaty ports where the vast majority of the country's press was concentrated "read" the famine field and the movement of refugees in substantially different ways, depending on their choice or habit of news consumption. This may seem like an obvious point, but only by explaining China's various platforms of current event coverage and commentary can we grasp how the famine of 1920-21 entered the public imagination – and to what extent, in this case at least, the disparate citizenry of the Chinese Republic occupied alternative worlds *within* cities as much as *between* urban, coastal China and the hinterland. Indeed, judging by the announcements student organizations printed in prominent Beijing newspapers in late autumn 1921 – "What day is today? Drought Disaster Commemoration Day" ran one such call – some urban Chinese required reminders that tens of millions of their countrymen were on the verge of starvation a few hundred miles away.[13] Then Qinghua University students brought onto the Shandong famine field in 1920 as translators for foreign aid workers were, according to the head of American Red Cross operations, "almost unanimously" expressed that they "had no idea that any of our people lived as these farmers live," having supposed the China's agricultural population "at least (lived) as well as the laborers and servants in the city live."[14]

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spotty in their coverage of the vast famine field and give glimpses of relief in real time, without any follow-up with which total relief volumes over the crisis can be determined.

[13] *Chenbao*, 17 Dec. 1920. *Chenbao*, 18 Dec. 1920.

[14] John Earl Baker, *Explaining China* (London: A. M. Philpot Ltd., 1927), 241.

A comparative look at the various discursive platforms offered by Chinese dailies of the 1920s helps bring these, if not discrete, at least parallel social universes into relief. On the one hand, readers of major broadsheets like *Chenbao* (The Morning Post) and *Shuntian shibao* in the capital or Shanghai's *Shibao* (Eastern Times) and *Shenbao* (Chinese Daily News) would take in events as they unfolded largely through a boardroom perspective on the crisis – meeting notes, reports and proposals by the "international" relief societies, the Chinese YMCA or Red Cross, investigations by staff journalists or reformist student groups, crop failure statistics and refugee movement, theatrical fundraisers, donor lists – all printed between graphic ads for Nestlé's Milk Food ("perfect nutriment for infants, children and invalids"), China Ross Co. tablets for "vitality, health, energy, vigor" (with the image of a worn-out middle-aged Chinese man seated between a charging steamship and locomotive) and its competitor, Doan's tonic tablets ("The real Tonic for weak and rundown people," embodied by yet another Chinese), Jordan Silhouette and Velie Six motorcars, Pond's Vanishing Cream, Hennessy Cognac or Cutex nail products – not to mention in some cases Western-style political cartoons lambasting traditional caricatures or a photo collage of wretched famine victims juxtaposed with Chinese Boy Scouts celebrating the 1920 National Day in October with drilling and physical exercise.[15] On the other hand, through the fall of 1920 readers of Beijing tabloids *Aiguo baihuabao*, *Fengsheng*, *Shihua* (The Daily Truth), *Xiao gongbao* or *Zhongguo minbao* would see plain, print-only pages with image-free advertisements for native banks, booksellers, local pharmaceuticals, clinics and native cigarette brands while taking in grain distribution or shelter operation by Buddhist groups or by charities like the capital's *Wushanshe* or *Wowotouhui* societies along with street-level news of bulk grain handouts by individuals or the opening and closing of official or charity soup kitchens.

[15] The cartoons appeared through the fall and winter of 1920-21 in *Shenbao*, *Shibao*, and *Yishibao*. The photo collage is from *Shibao*'s issue of October 17, 1920. Of these major papers, *Chenbao* and *Da gongbao* offered the most consistent coverage of relief at the county level, with occasional coverage of smaller-scale activity.

Magazines, dealt with more in our last chapter, were another form of news and commentary in China's main cities, and, similar to their daily counterparts, reflected different social landscapes, from the reformist *Dongfang zazhi*, or *Eastern Miscellany*, based in Shanghai and replete with advertisements for General Electric, Daisy rifles, and Williams' shaving soap, to more plainly native platforms of content and advertising such as Beijing's monthly *Minsheng yuekan***.** Sitting astride of these worlds, some publications, like the established Tianjin broadsheet *Da gongbao*, purchased in 1916 by the ruling Beiyang regime around the time of the death of president Yuan Shikai,[16] did run regular reports on the workings of relief in Zhili at the level of the county *yamen* but in between advertisements for all sorts of foreign consumer products. Finally, in some extreme cases, news sources in the main treaty port of Shanghai did not even appear to be covering the same country at the height of famine: throughout March 1921 the pages of Shanghai's *Zhonghua xinbao* gave little idea that famine existed at all in the North, and the same can be said of the news selection in Shanghai's *Xinwen bao*, a paper "Incorporated under the Laws of Delaware," according to its masthead, printed between plugs for Palmolive hand soap and Chesterfield cigarettes.[17] In other words, the provenance and portrayal of products promoted in any given 1920s publication largely correlated with the platform's disaster relief coverage, presenting strikingly different social landscapes: one replete with the new images and standards with which the consumer-citizen distinguished himself from his or her traditional or "backward" counterpart, the other consisting of customary modes of consumption and social networking stretching from Beijing backstreet *hutong* south to the famine-struck Yellow River delta. And then, while some major broadsheets were in fact distributed far beyond their respective hometowns of Shanghai and Beijing, literate residents of rural Shanxi or Henan getting hold of,

[16] William Kirby, et al., ed., *State and Economy in Republican China: a handbook for scholars, Vol. 1* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, Harvard University Press, 2000), 55.
[17] *Xinwen bao*, 1 Feb. 1921.

say, issues of *Shenbao* and *Shuntian shibao* would surely have read famine coverage much differently than treaty port residents otherwise cut off from life in the interior.

One last aspect of the news reading experience in 1920 might be mentioned. In this soul-searching period for many Chinese trying to account for their country's trouncing in all areas political, economic, or military, otherwise straightforward news briefs occasionally ended with a line of social or political commentary (by the reporter or editor remains unclear) that, in the context of the humanitarian crisis, made sweeping comparisons between Chinese vis-à-vis the "foreigner (*waiguoren*)" or "Westerner (*xiren*)." "Refugees have good fortune to run into charitable foreigners (*zaimin xingguo waiguo shanren*)" ran the headline of a story in an October issue of *Chenbao*, one of China's largest news dailies by circulation, after a "Western" couple was spotted giving $3 to keep a hungry refugee family, from Zaoqiang County, Zhili, from selling their two sons on a Beijing streetcorner. "This foreign generosity (*wairen rexin*, literally 'warm-heartedness'), however admirable," the article ended, "should give us pause to consider (*zhuannian yixiang*) how it shames us Chinese (*wei Zhongguoren xiusha*)," who, presumably, did nothing in this instance to help their fellow countrymen.[18] Later in the fall, however, readers of the more obscure *Shihua* daily would learn that when an impoverished woman arrived in Beijing from the extreme south of Zhili and sold her infant grandson, intervention was made by an altogether different agent. General Wang Huaiqing, commander of the metropolitan gendarmerie, reportedly caught wind of the boy's sale and sent a staffer with a sum of money he donated (*juan*) for his redemption (*shuhui*) so the woman and child could return home to Daming together.[19] *Shihua* treated the story, though, as straight news – if also as good public relations for

[18] *Chenbao*, 15 Oct. 1920.
[19] *Shihua*, 23 Dec. 1920.

a prominent member of the city's military establishment – without the conscious "cultural" comparison with foreigners exercised by *Chenbao*.

Beijing: a city mobilizes

"To their everlasting credit be it recorded that the Chinese in Peking got busy long before the foreigners who live among them did anything," the *Saturday Evening Post*'s Eleanor Franklin Egan wrote in 1921. "One after another all-Chinese famine-relief committees began to spring up until there were more than 20 engaged in collecting funds, buying and bringing in grain from the north and receiving and establishing in camps the crowds of refugees who began struggling in…"[20]

Egan, who produced arguably the most insightful reportage from among the ranks of China's foreign correspondents that year, referred to relief mobilization in the Chinese capital that took on three basic forms: groups of a purely fundraising nature, such as restaurant or theatrical collectives raising money for the benefit of state or other relief efforts; groups with both fundraising and local relief distribution operations, such as charities, benevolence halls and individuals setting up shelters or handing out cash, grain or relief clothing to refugees pouring into the city; and groups, large and small, that both raised their own funds and dispatched relief beyond the city to the surrounding districts and deep into the famine field.

We begin with the fundraisers. The idea of raising monies for the relief of distant fellow Chinese was of course not a new one in 1920. The overseas Chinese diaspora had for decades already been a major source of charitable and relief funding for causes on the mainland.[21] Similarly, in 1920 relief dollars by the hundreds of thousands were remitted to China from

[20] Egan, "Fighting the Chinese Famine," 46.
[21] See Glen Peterson, "Overseas Chinese and Merchant Philanthropy in China: From Culturalism to Nationalism," *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 1/1 (May 2005), 87-109.

Chinese communities as far flung as Sydney, Singapore, Honolulu, Yokohama and Vancouver.[22] Historians have also identified inter-provincial relief activity arising as far back as 1870s south China, specifically the affluent lower Yangzi delta around Shanghai where in cities like Hangzhou, Suzhou and Yangzhou, the proceeds from activities at art galleries, teahouses and other such cultural gathering spots were harnessed by activists for the benefit of the famine-stricken North in the early years of the Guangxu reign, or 1876-79.[23] There has been, however, little scholarly attention to comparable fundraising activity by communities, urban or rural, *within or near to* the disaster zones of north China in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with which we can compare such activity in 1920. What we can say is that in Beijing's autumn of 1920 monies were indeed raised from a motley and broad-based collection of sources, according to local news stories and announcements: these included the proceeds of ticket sales at acrobatic shows in the city's Sihai district, surcharges initiated by management at bathhouses, charity publicity posted in restaurants throughout the city, profits from sales of, in one case, "exquisite" inlaid household wares and "ingenious cigarette lighters" by a native bank holding an event in a public park, and theatrical performances by entertainers of various levels of repute, including operatic renditions by a relief fundraising collective of prostitutes – the euphemistically-named Relief Society of All Kinds of Flowers, or *Qunfang zhuzhen hui* – performing "old and new numbers" for the benefit of a relief fund at a large hall starting in December.[24] Further detail on the mobilization of charitable relief monies and expenditure on the reception of refugees streaming into northern cities in 1920-21 will have to wait for later chapters. For now, it might

[22] *Zhongguo minbao*, 24 Oct. 1920. *Beijing ribao*, 28 Oct. 1920. *The China Sun*, 6 Nov. 1920.
[23] Mary Backus Rankin, *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China: Zhejiang Province, 1868-1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986). Kathryn Edgerton-Tarpley, *Tears from Iron: Cultural Responses to Famine in Nineteenth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 131-58. Roberta Wue, "The Profits of Philanthropy: Relief Aid, *Shenbao*, and the Art World in Later Nineteenth-Century Shanghai," *Late Imperial China* 25/1 (June 2004), 187-211.
[24] *Zhongguo minbao*, 30 Oct. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 12 Jan. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 1 Nov. 1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 18 Dec. 1920. *Chenbao*, 24 Sept. 1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 2 Dec. 1920. *Minyi ribao*, 2 Dec. 1920.

be pointed out that, in many cases, such extragovernmental fundraising was for the benefit of an array of other organizations dispensing relief, many of which were soon projecting their operations into the famine field itself.

The appearance of relief societies in 1920 Beijing began most prominently with a mid-September meeting of various past and future premiers and presidents of the Republic, including Li Yuanhong, Liang Shiyi, Wang Daxie, and Xiong Xiling. Liang, a future premier, had already been forming a relief group of his own in September called the North China Relief Society with the stated aim of providing both free and rail/road/canal-work relief to the stricken with grain brought in Manchuria, after which he invited members of the Chinese YMCA to his residence to discuss the way forward. For their part, Xiong and Wang, both former premiers, were working with Zhao Erxun, chief editor of the official Qing annals, to form the Beiwusheng relief society headquartered at the offices of the Chinese Red Cross on a Beijing *hutong* and launched with a public drive for used-clothing for impoverished refugees already streaming into the city.[25]

To help us bring some clarity to the social circles active in relief that year, the figure of Xiong Xiling deserves special attention. China's most prominent high-level relief activist and facilitator at the time, he was a man with a foot in a remarkable variety of social scenes. Born in in 1870 in Hunan in central China, to a military father, and raised with a traditional Confucian-style education that led to his earning a *jinshi* degree in 1894, Xiong was active in late Qing and early Republican politics, most prominently as premier of the Republic in 1913-14 and afterwards as director-general of the Yellow River basin's Flood Relief and River Conservancy. When hard rains and a rush of silt on five Zhili rivers flooded over one hundred counties in July of 1917, however, it had been as an afflicted resident of a flooded Tianjin neighborhood that

[25] These groups were the *Huabei jiuzai xiehui* and *Beiwusheng hanzai zhenji hui*, respectively. *Minguo ribao*, 14 Sept. 1920. *Shuntian shibao*, 13 Sept. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 22 Sept. 1920. *Yishi bao*, 18 Sept. 1920.

Xiong initiated and orchestrated relief for some six million people left homeless across the province that year.[26]

Despite his traditional upbringings, Xiong and his family tapped into a considerable wider social scene, a fact evidenced by the memoir of an American woman who had met Xiong's wife, Zhu Qihui, at a luncheon of prominent foreign and Chinese women a few years into the 1920s hosted by the wife of an American banking official. Zhu – who walked with an impaired gait from having had bound feet as a child, and who had acquired no English, only Japanese – was herself remarkably active in charities in the capital, including various Chinese Red Cross institutions.[27] Her daughter, Rose, meanwhile, was freshly returned from college in the United States, and "danc[ing] very well, and in public," her "bobbed and waved hair" and "excellent English" made her the "best example of the flapper style" that the American had met in Beijing.[28]

The fact that Xiong, a former premier, initiated joint efforts with members of the foreign diplomatic community in the fall of 1920, as we have seen, should then not come as a surprise. But he was also a devout Buddhist, organizing a series of theological lectures at the capital's Xiangfang Bridge Guanyin Temple in the late 1910s when he fraternized with two men, Ma Jiping and Wu Bihua, who would be central in the founding of what would become one of the largest famine relief groups in 1920-21, the Buddhist Relief Society. Members of the sutra lecture group at the Guanyin Temple formed the society on the 12th of September, which within

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[26] Zhou Qiuguang, *Xiong Xiling zhuan* (A Biography of Xiong Xiling) (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 2006), 409-11.

[27] Zhu Qihui's secretary and interpreter listed her occupations to the American: chief director of the Chinese Women's Red Cross Society; director of a Red Cross hospital and a Red Cross Obstetrical hospital; president of the Chinese and Foreign Women's Philanthropic Society of Peking; member of a Chinese and foreign famine relief association; director of the Women's Commercial Savings Bank; president of the Girls' School of Commerce; and chairman of the Preparation Committee of the Metropolitan Bank of Peking. Grace Thompson Seton, *Chinese Lanterns* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1924), 272.

[28] *Ibid*., 215, 270.

weeks was collecting donations from the public at banks and temples for delivery along a monastic network to rural counties.[29] It was Ma Jiping who presided over the founding meeting of the relief society with a call for fundraising in south China where Buddhist monasticism and lay participation had been strongest over the centuries, and which was experiencing a Buddhist revival in the early Republic. Ma appointed a Jiangsu native and Buddhist layman, Zhuang Yunkuan, head of Beijing's audit bureau, as the society's registered chairman.

For his part, Wu Bihua, an army officer trained in Japan who served in China's national assembly in 1918, would figure in how this lay Buddhist lecture network grew to have disaster relief branches nationally. After organizing lectures with Xiong at the Beijing temple, Wu returned in 1919 to his native county in Zhejiang to run an elementary school. There, in nearby Hangzhou in 1920, he would open a branch of the Buddhist relief society, fundraising and traveling personally to the famine zone to dispense relief and establish shelters for refugees. In similar fashion branches formed in major cities like Tianjin and in stricken rural counties themselves, such as Xingtang County in central-west Zhili where a branch of the Buddhist relief society was reportedly running a "packed" home for refugee orphans in February 1921. Funding for the Buddhist Relief Society came both in the form of donations from the general public and grants from other relief groups: one January announcement credited Shanghai's main international relief society with a $10,000 grant, a Tianjin Relief of Suffering Society (*jiuku hui*)

[29] Of the readily traceable attendees at the first meeting of the society (*Quanguo Fojiao chouzhen hui*, variously named *Fojiao zhenji hui*), one hailed from Hubei, one from Zhejiang, two from Jiangsu, and two from Fujian. This group should not be confused with Shanghai's Buddhist Compassion Society (*Fojiao cibei hui*, founded in Shanghai during the 1917 Zhili floods), which had a specially-formed sub-society for sponsoring infants in the 1920 famine zone, the Buddhist Foundling Relief Society (*Fojiao jiuying hui*). *Shuntian shibao*, 15 Sept. 1920. *Shihua*, 16 Sept. 1920. *Shibao*, 9 Nov. 1920; *Zhongguo minbao*, 1 Oct. 1920. Yu Lingbo, ed., *Xiandai Fojiao renwu cidian* (Biographical dictionary of modern Buddhist figures) (Sanzhong [Taibei]: Foguang chuban she, 2004), 927, 1066, 1267, 1580. Cai Hongyuan, ed., *Minguo renwu bieming suoyin* (Index of the alternative names of Republican figures) (Changchun: Jilin renmin chuban she, 2001), 89, 259. Xu, *Minguo renwu*, 806. *Zhengfu gongbao*, 8 Oct. 1920.

with $5,000, and 400 sets of infant clothes from the clothing-drive launched by Xiong's Beiwusheng relief society.[30]

While Xiong Xiling had been instrumental in orchestrating the relief of millions during floods three years before, in 1920 he had a hand in multiple relief endeavors but took overall a less prominent role, for reasons that are unclear. His main contribution was to shepherd eighteen Chinese relief societies in early October into a larger umbrella group under the auspices of Liang Shiyi's North China Relief Society above, with Liang himself as chairman. Xiong went on to work behind the scenes, serving on various committees and advocating certain relief policies in the press or appealing for famine loans from overseas, but otherwise China's most prominent philanthropist of the era mostly confined himself to an orphanage he had established in the hills west of Beijing for 600 refugee boys and girls from the 1917 flood.[31] This step downward in relief prominence would leave a personality vacuum in the national relief effort of 1920, one in which other, specifically foreign, figures would step in, as we will see later.

Judging by several traceable examples, other Chinese relief committees forming in the capital at the outset of the crisis tended to do so along professional and native-region lines. One such committee was the aforementioned Shunzhi relief society, formed on the 11th of September by prominent natives of rural Zhili counties residing in the capital. All served in civil and military posts, and fundraising was launched with a general appeal for funds from military

[30] Despite the near total absence of the Buddhist Relief Society in both the 1922 wrap-up report by the Peking committee and in the full eleven-month run of Liang Shiyi's *Jiuzai zhoukan* (absences we will revisit in chapter five), we can fill in much of its contribution through several other extant sources used later as we tour the disaster zone. The Buddhist society produced its own paper trail, albeit one that normally appeared in less prominent news platforms across the country, and it dispatched its own teams of monks and lay Buddhist investigators into the Zhili, Shanxi and Henan famine zones, conferring with local gentry or at rural temples with resident monks about the extent of local distress. While the September establishment of the Buddhist Relief Society was widely covered in the press, thereafter the group's field reports were largely limited to Shanghai's *Shibao*, the Buddhist magazine *Haichao yin*, and obscure Beijing dailies, such as *Shihua*, *Fengsheng*, and, especially, *Zhongguo minbao*. Yu, *Xiandai Fojiao*, 398-9. *Chenbao*, 3 Oct. 1920. *Chenbao*, 3 Feb. 1920. *Xiao minbao*, 6 Jan. 1921.

[31] Zhou, *Xiong Xiling*, 414-9. *Zhongguo minbao*, 4 Oct. 1920.

governors nationwide and an initial gift of $100,000 from Chinese President and Tianjin-native Xu Shichang, followed by a well-publicized art and antique sale at Beijing's Zhongyang park.[32] This group of Zhili natives stood in contrast to the Northern Emergency Relief Society, which formed the same week with the interest on the investments of a group of Zhejiang Province sojourners in the capital, all of whom served in the Finance Ministry and in other financial positions.[33]

Two smaller groups formed in the capital in the fall along similarly regional lines: the Capital Region Drought Disaster Relief Society was founded with the intent of setting up soup kitchens around the capital by two career army officers, natives of greater Beijing's Tong and greater Tianjin's Wuqing counties.[34] The Poor Relief Society was founded in September by two finance officials from Zhejiang and Jiangsu to "follow the lead (*fang zhao*)" of already-existing Beijing charities by setting up soup kitchens and distributing grain and coffins. (After quickly garnering seed money totaling $1,000 from two dozen individuals, a bank and the Interior and Finance ministries, later that Fall, the Poor Relief Society would take in donations of substantial sizes, in one case $18,000 from one Luo Shuyun.)[35]

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[32] Initiators of the *Shunzhi hanzai jiuji hui* hailed from the following Zhili counties: General Wang Huaiqing, commander of the Beijing garrison (Ningjin County), Yin Hongshou, the Beijing chief of police (Tianjin), Wang Hu, the chief administrator of the metropolitan region (Ding), former army officer Jiang Yanxing (Fucheng), Gu Zhongxiu (Ding), and Liu Ruoceng (Yanshan). *Shihua*, 9 Sept. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 12 Sept. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 18 Sept. 1920. Xu, *Minguo renwu*, 28, 407-8, 109-10, 706, 731, 1377, 1429. Park fundraiser reported in *Beijing ribao*, 9 Oct. 1920 and *Shihua*, 15 Oct. 1920.

[33] Founders of the *Beifang jizhen xiehui* included Zhejiang natives Wang Kemin, Shi Zhaoceng, Lu Zongyu, Wu Dingchang, and Cao Rulin (a native of Shanghai). This effort apparently grew out of a poor relief society (*jipin hui*) funded by interest on gold deposits that was in planning earlier in August by those named above in addition to Zhejiang natives Zhang Hu, Qian Nengxun, and Sun Baoqi along with Ye Gongchuo, a Guangdong native and minister of communications through the crisis. *Shihua*, 30 Aug. 1920. *Shuntian shibao*, 16 Sept. 1920. Xu, *Minguo renwu*, 55, 365-6, 616, 796, 809-10, 887, 989-90, 1256, 1530. *Zhengfu gongbao*, 13 June 1921.

[34] Wang Zhixiang and Li Zhangtai were listed as the founders of this group, the *Jingzhao zaihuang jiuji hui*. *Shuntian shibao*, 26 Oct. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 27 Oct. 1920. Xu, *Minguo renwu*, 55-6, 277-8.

[35] Co-founders of this group, the *Pinmin jiuji hui*, were Zhang Shouyang and Zhu Yanyu. *Beijing ribao*, 18 Sept. 1920. Xu, *Minguo renwu*, 193, 963. *Shuntian shibao*, 19 Sept. 1920. *Zhenzai ribao*, 25 Nov. 1920.

Beyond the dozens of native relief charities formed in Beijing and the treaty ports across China in 1920-21, four other organizational phenomena lay behind relief activity. The first, benevolence halls, had existed in parts of north and south China at least since the late Ming, a social phenomena studied by Fuma Susumu and Joanna Handlin Smith.[36] What should be stressed here is that in 1920 their relief activity extended well beyond the neighborhood, operating in the interior independently of the state or larger relief groups. In early October 1920, one Zhou Jingzhai and associates with a "shared resolve (*tongzhi*)" reportedly assembled on a Beijing *hutong* to form what they dubbed a Cotton Clothing Aid Society at west Beijing's Esteemed Goodness benevolence hall, or Baoshantang, targeting "each" of the afflicted counties of the metropolitan region with their own clothes distribution operation starting the twelfth of October.[37]

A second form of relief organization in 1920 were the syncretic religious groups popular among Confucian gentry as far back as the late Ming that, in the Republican era, took on a more consciously "Eastern" spiritual identity (in relation to the materialist "West"), groups dubbed "redemptive societies" by historian Prasenjit Duara.[38] In the fall of 1920, inside Xuanwu Gate at the Fellowship of Goodness, or *Tongshanshe*, one Gong Yinxuan set off to purchase 5,000 sets of clothing at a north Beijing market for mid-October delivery by, apparently, truck to two stricken counties: Gu'an, just south of the capital, and Ji, further south by the border with Shandong.[39] His society, founded in 1914 Beijing, had chapters across the country by the 1920s, particularly in the Northeast where, as we will see in a later chapter, it fundraised for the relief of

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[36] Fuma, *Zhongguo shanhui.* Smith, *The Art of Doing Good*.
[37] This group was named the *Mianyi zhuzhen hui. Shihua*, 10 Oct. 1920.
[38] "In many ways these societies represented a development of the late imperial syncretic tradition (*sanjiao heyi*)," Duara explains, "which first gained popularity among the Confucian gentry as well as the Buddhist and Daoist laity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – particularly in their emphasis on a redemptive universalism and moral self-transformation." Duara, "Of Authenticity and Woman," 342-3.
[39] *Beijing baihuabao*, 23 Oct. 1920.

north China over the 1920-21 famine year, dispatching funds along its own networks. We will examine in greater detail another one of these groups, the *Wushanshe*, which can be rendered somewhat awkwardly as the Society for Awakening Goodness, in our chapter on Beijing.[40]

Native-place associations – organizations that traditionally served as social and mutual-assistance institutions around the country, and even overseas, for people of common geographic origins – were third type of relief mobilization, often at the provincial level. In the capital, they began their respective fundraising efforts as early as mid-September, with 75 Shandong natives holding a relief meeting on a Beijing *hutong* where $5,000 was provided by a member for initial canvassing expenses to determine the extent of the Shandong disaster zone. The Henan Relief Society was similarly formed of Henan natives in mid-September at a Beijing meeting hall, as was the Shanxi Relief Fundraising Society formed at a Beijing villa that month while a relief society of Shaanxi natives convened at Beijing's Guanzhong (central Shaanxi) *huiguan*.[41] For their part, Zhili and Shandong natives in the vast breadbasket of the northeast (where they and their descendants comprised some ninety percent of the population in the provinces of Fengtian, Jilin and Heilongjiang) were forming societies for the relief of their respective native provinces to the south, a topic we will explore in chapter four. Meanwhile, natives of the northeastern provinces who were sojourning in Beijing in 1921 launched their own famine relief society at the capital's Fengtian *huiguan* later that winter.[42]

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[40] The "ethical-philosophical-religious" group, translated also as United Goodness Society, traced its origins to a religious figure in Sichuan but was actually founded in 1914 Beijing by men from official circles, according to a researcher in the 1920s when there were "chapters in nearly every province, city, and district in China" and some 10,000 members, mostly affluent merchants and officials. Paul de Witt Twinem, "Modern Syncretic Religious Societies in China. I," *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 5, No. 5 (Sept. 1925), 464-7. I am indebted to Shi Xia for bringing this article to my attention.

[41] These groups were, respectively, the *Shandong zaiqu jiuji hui, Henan hanzai jiuji hui*, *Shanxi chouzhen hui*, and *Sanqin gongmin jiu Shaan hui*. *Jingbao*, 24 Sept. 1920. *Shihua*, 16 Sept. 1920. *Shuntian shibao*, 22 Sept. 1920. *Shihua*, 20 Sept. 1920.

[42] *Shengjing shibao*, 20 Oct. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 16 Sept. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 12 Oct. 1920. *Guo bao*, 3 March 1921.

Finally, county, prefectural and provincial societies were a fourth type of relief activity, both fundraising and facilitating the delivery of official and charitable relief from outside the county. This included the Shen County Relief Society formed in Beijing at a meeting of 100 sojourning natives of that central Zhili county with the aim of providing discount grain, free relief and interest-free loans to farmers back home (with the *Shihua* daily reporting in October on "reliable" estimates that $100,000 would quickly be raised) and the relief group formed in the Fall in Beijing by merchant/gentry natives of central Zhili's Shulu (today's Xinji city in Shijiazhuang Prefecture).[43] At the prefectural level, provinces were also divided in an informal fashion among societies of sojourning natives in Beijing; natives of western Henan met at Beijing's Heluo *huiguan* in late October to discuss the canvassing and relief of nineteen western Henan counties, while a Beijing-Wannan Relief Society formed later in January 1921 with offices in the garden of a Li household in the capital to coordinate and draw in relief for thirteen other Henan counties.[44] And on a provincial level, one of the largest native relief efforts in 1920-21 was quasi-governmental hybrid group founded on September 20 by several members of Jinan society, the provincial capital, and ran along relief channels that largely bypassed Beijing.[45] The Shandong Relief Society – or *zaihuang gonghui*, possibly the only relief group in the country that year to use the term *gong*, or public (in the sense of "open to all"), in its name, suggesting its quasi-official status – was led by Lü Haihua. A native of eastern Shandong who had headed the Chinese Red Cross during its first few years starting in 1908 before directing relief affairs for the Shandong government in 1914, Lü was apparently appointed by the provincial leadership to

[43] *Chenbao*, 28 Sept. 1920. *Shihua,* 1 Oct. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 17 Dec. 1920.
[44] *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 6 March 1921.
[45] *Zhonghua minguo shi dang'an ziliao huibian* (A compilation from the archives of the Chinese Republic), Vol. 3. *Nongshang* (Farming and Trade) 1 (Nanjing, 1991), 384-390.

head the relief organ.[46] "One dollar saves a life!" was the group's slogan to rouse support for their Shandong compatriots (*tongbao*), words uttered by vice chair He Chunjiang (aka He Zonglian) in the opening address at a fundraising event involving public entertainments at a Jinan park in mid-October.[47] He, a graduate of the famous Beiyang military academy with service in remote Gansu and Chahar, had been appointed to the army council in 1918.[48] Both men were referred to in the press as Jinan gentry, or *shen*, terms normally applied to men who were not currently holding office, as in the late imperial period, suggesting that they were tapped to run the operation only for the duration of the crisis. The group sought relief funds both in the other 75 relatively unafflicted counties in Shandong[49] and as far away as Harbin in China's extreme Northeast, where two representatives held a fundraiser at the Shandong *huiguan* in November while chair Lü Jingyu made personal appeals for donations to Harbin's Charity Relief Society (*yizhen hui*), an organization we will explore further in chapter four.[50] Over the fall, other fundraisers were dispatched by the society to Qingdao, Yantai, Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Ningbo, Zhejiang, Hubei, and Jiangxi.[51] Complicating any centralized effort to tabulate or track the source or flow of relief over the course of the crisis, grain or clothes dispatched by these native-place groups often by-passed Beijing or the treaty-ports altogether, being ferried, trained or carted directly from Manchuria southward or from Hubei on the Yangzi directly to the zone.

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[46] Xu, *Minguo renwu*, 319.
[47] At one of the earlier fundraising meetings, $40,000 was donated by the military governor, surnamed Lu, $10,000 by a Liu Zishan, and "many other rural people (*xiangren*) donated several thousand each." *Beijing ribao*, 12 Oct. 1920. *Minyi ribao*, 11 Nov. 1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 10 Nov. 1920.
[48] Xu, *Minguo renwu*, 671.
[49] Estimated relief needs were daunting: 3,799,800 victims in the province (defined as first and second tier poor, plus the old and young) each requiring five coppers a day amounted to $4,222,840 a month (at an exchange rate of 135 coppers per silver dollar) for a total of $29,559,698 for the seven months from October to April. *Zhonghua minguo shi dang'an ziliao huibian*, 390.
[50] *Yuandong bao*, 18 Nov. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 5 Dec. 1920.
[51] *Zhonghua minguo shi dang'an ziliao huibian*, 384.

Here, the designation "gentry" (*shen*/*shenshi*/*shendong*), which, in this period of social flux, was a rather confused term, deserves some further clarification. In the capital and other major urban centers, the term, perhaps better translated as "gentleman," seems to have been used in the 1920s Chinese press as a default term for anyone not identified as coming from several commonly delineated circles (*jie*): official (*guan/zheng*), military (*jun*), police (*jing*), business/merchant (*shang*), medical (*yi*), monastic (*seng*), education/ student (*xue*), farming (*nong*), worker (*gong*), or non-Chinese (nationality was then usually specified). In other words, the term *shen* was often employed when not assigning any specific occupational affiliation to a news subject, an important point when trying to identify in what capacities (official, professional, personal, etc.) people were acting in the 1920 crisis. (Then, some sources – serving perhaps a more cosmopolitan, "modern" readership – used instead the appellation *xiansheng*, or "mister", others the more traditional *jun*, or "sir".) In the rural context, however, *shen* can be more safely translated as "gentry," referring to the segment of a community privileged in varying ways by its land and/or degree-holdings earned through the civil examination system, which had been abolished in 1905 during late Qing reforms but which still retained cultural currency.[52] Throughout this study, figures will be identified as gentry when the sources have done so, and, depending on the context, the term can be so interpreted by the reader.

[52] To put this another way, "The terms *shen* and *shen-shih* occur regularly in [20th century] accounts of rural conditions," Philip Kuhn writes on the subject, "and quite plainly refer to a class whose style of life, social status, and political pretensions were not notably different from those of the old degree-holding elite." "The fuzzy definitions" of the gentry "in the work of a trained anthropologist like Fei Hsiao-t'ung," he adds, "are not due to a lack of concern with methodological questions but rather to a search for functional description instead of formal classification. What Fei means when he includes 'educated landowners' within the gentry category for the twentieth century is that such men enjoyed prestige and exercised powers like those of the group known historically as *shen-shih*." Philip Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China: Militarization and Social Structure, 1796-1864* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1970), 221.

The central state

Before we move to an examination of evidence of relief in the zone itself, we must make sense of the central and provincial state's role in the 1920-21 crisis. With the onset of famine conditions in September 1920, the *North China Herald*, a prominent British mouthpiece in the international settlement of Shanghai, had condemned what it saw as Beijing's "characteristic attempt to push off the responsibility of action upon provincial officials," later adding that what was "needed and what as yet we see no sign of is a coordinated effort, directed by the Government as a whole," to bring together the "present spasmodic efforts of individual persons and agencies."[53] The editors of the British paper were correct in pointing out both the lack of a Qing-style central bureaucratic *direction* to relief operations in 1920 and the flowering of myriad aid efforts – both massive and modest – by individuals and agencies across the five-province famine belt. They failed to appreciate, however, two key characteristics of the native relief efforts unfolding hundreds of miles from their perch in the treaty-port of Shanghai: the vital degree of official coordination required to acquire and deliver grain across the jurisdictions of increasingly independent and rivalrous warlord regimes, and the fact that many of these extragovernmental efforts were engineered by members of these same military establishments condemned for their supposed inaction in the face of a calamitous famine. In other words, in the absence of a solvent central state in 1920, and in light of the correspondingly low public faith in the integrity of cash-starved public institutions, many in official circles themselves put resources and energies into the myriad quasi-governmental groups that had formed contemporaneously with formal state relief programs in the fall.

[53] "In spite of past experience the Government finds itself with no better machinery for dealing with the situation than that which must be hastily improvised," the paper determined in October, and at the middle of the month, it saw "no ground for supposing that Peking [would] surpass itself in anything but culpable negligence." *North China Herald*, 25 Sept. 1920. *North China Herald*, 9 Oct. 1920. *North China Herald*, 16 Oct. 1920.

Considering the increasingly fragmented nature of the Chinese state in the years leading up to the drought, and the lack of a central clearinghouse for relief funds and materials passing into the zone, Ministry of Communications accounting ledgers of the volumes of relief materials running along the Chinese Government Railway network during the month of December 1920 offer an invaluable, if imperfect, snapshot of relief activity in late Fall 1920 through which we can view this third quasi-governmental dimension of native relief.[54] (See the **Appendix** for detail on the data from this source.) In total, food aid from Chinese sources running along the rails of north China in the very last month of 1920 amounted to 170,457,191 *jin*. At $75 a ton, this had a market value of $8,144,869, and was enough for daily rations of half a *jin* per person for 31 days to 10,997,238 people – or roughly half of the destitute at that point in all five provinces.[55] (See **Table 1** below for a list of grain measurements used throught this study and their standard conversions.)

As for Zhili specifically, in December, the month for which we have the most detailed data, thirty relief agencies – excluding the international societies and missions – were credited with bringing in 115,203,968 daily relief rations (that is, 57,601,984 *jin* of grain) to points throughout the province, enough to feed 3,716,257 Zhili residents for the month, or nearly half of the eight million estimated to be destitute there that month. Yet only a fourth of this originated with the Government Relief Bureau based in Beijing, the Zhili provincial government, or other official organs, such as the military. The rest, according to this source, was sponsored by private

[54] Only the records for this month appear to have seen print, appearing in the Beiyang central government weekly gazette *Zhengfu gongbao* after the passing of the famine in 1921. Government gazettes printed selected correspondence on relief matters between levels of the state at the central, provincial, prefectural, county and even village levels, although their readership was undoubtedly limited. For our purposes, charts of relief movement along the Ministry of Communications rail lines were occasionally printed, but these sources only rarely detail which groups were in fact behind particular relief shipments, which limits their use when trying to break down relief actors and contributions. Gazettes in 1920-21 included the central state weekly *Zhengfu gongbao* and *Laifu bao*, a weekly of the Shanxi provincial government. *Zhengfu gongbao*, 13 June 1921.

[55] $75 a ton was the going price charged relief agencies for grain in Tianjin; the ration is the one used by major international relief societies over the year.

or quasi-governmental organizations, led by the Buddhist Relief Society, which delivered to ten rail heads in the province enough grain to feed 1,513,771 people for the month, and Liang Shiyi's North China Relief Society, which brought in enough to feed 322,560 people over the same 31-day stretch.[56]

Table 1: Official grain measurements & conversions, 1920-21[57]

合 *he* = 1/10th of a *sheng* = 1/5 of a *jin*
磅 *pang* (pound avoirdupois) = ¾ of a *jin*
斤 *jin* (catty) = 1 1/3 lbs.
升 *sheng* (pint) = 1/10th of a *dou* = 2 *jin*
斗 *dou* (peck) = 20 *jin*[58]
袋 *dai* ("bag") = 50 *pang* = 37.5 *jin*
擔 *dan* (picul) = 100 *jin*
石 *shi* ("stone") = 120 *jin*[59]
包 *bao* ("sack") = 160 *jin*
噸 *dun* (ton) = 1,680 *jin*

[56] For a more detailed breakdown of this activity, see Appendix A. It should also be recalled that these are totals for relief running on government rails only, and do not include that supplied by local granaries or moved over roads or water. As is the case with a few other entries in this record, a 3,000-ton shipment to Shijiazhuang by the North China Relief Society is marked clothing, but, considering its sheer size, was presumably a shipment of grain. (If such shipments did contain clothing, their value would have been far higher.) Then there is the ever-present issue of clerical accuracy regarding stated volumes: the Buddhist Relief Society's total includes a massive 120,000 *shi* shipment of assorted grain from Yongding (Hunan) through the railhead at Fengtian, south of Beijing, a volume that cannot be readily cross-referenced with other sources but that is nevertheless consistent with the spread of the society's activity across the west Zhili famine zone. *Zhengfu gongbao*, 13 June 1921.
[57] *Zhengfu gongbao*, 13 June 1921.
[58] *Shihua*, 17 Aug. 1920.
[59] In its published accounting records, the Ministry of Communications converted both *shi* and *bao* into anything from 100 to 160 *jin* each. This study will treat *shi* at a common conversion of 120 *jin*, and *bao* at 160 *jin*.

In Shandong, over ninety percent of the 64,011,252 *jin* of relief grain moving on the railways in December were on behalf of private or quasi-governmental agencies, the largest contribution of 32,256,000 *jin* coming from Lü Haihuan's Shandong Relief Society, enough to feed over two million people for the month. Recipents of this aid would have presumably included the residents of Xiajin, De, Wudi, Linqing, Zhanhua, Deping, Jiyang, Wucheng, Guan, Pingyuan, Pingyin and En counties, all on the plains of northwest Shandong, where, as early as November, the group had dispatched staffers to distribute "substantial monies (*jukuan*)" with the help of county magistrates.[60] Even hard-hit counties had reportedly opened their own sub-branches of Lü Haihuan's larger Shandong Relief Society, such as Yicheng, a county of 180,000 in northwest Shandong with a 60 percent ruined crop, where in November the magistrate formed a committee, based near the county's agricultural association (*nonghui*) and chaired by local gentry (*gongzheng shenshi*), who divided residents into first and second tier poor, old and young – a process we will see performed throughout this study.[61] (It should also be mentioned that on the 1st of November, Shandong natives sojourning in Beijing launched a daily newspaper, *Zhenzai ribao*, devoted to covering and "drumming up support [*guchui*]" for the unfolding famine relief effort, a publication funded in part by advertisements for native banks.)[62] Wang Qiao'an

Significantly, though, no rule can be established on the success or failure of official relief organs over the entire famine field and every moment in the crisis year: of 40,192,243 *jin* of relief grain making it onto railway records in Henan in December (enough to carry 2,593,047 residents through the month, and contributed by thirteen relief agencies, again, excluding

[60] *Zhenzai ribao*, 19 Nov. 1920.
[61] *Da gongbao*, 24 Nov. 1920. *Zhenzai ribao*, 28 Nov. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 10 Dec. 1920.
[62] Founders included Wang Youhang, Qin Youquan, and Yang Yaoxiang. Unfortunately, only the first month's run of the daily could be located for this study. *Shuntian shibao*, 9 Oct. 1920. *Chenbao*, 27 Oct. 1920. *Zhenzai ribao*, 1 Nov. 1920.

international organizations) over four-fifths of it came from the provincial and county governments with a small contribution from Beijing's Government Relief Bureau.

Still, formal state stewardship of relief in 1920-21 evidently took a backseat to that carried out by hybrid organs composed of officials, military men, gentry, Buddhist or Christian churchmen, or other members of the public. Consequently, unlike the recent 1917 Zhili flood relief directed by former statesman and philanthropist Xiong Xiling, no single Chinese figure or relief organ, public or private, would be associated with overall relief operations. Relief efforts, remarkably decentralized, took the form of layered webs of networks at all levels and scales: *within* rural villages, counties and prefectures in the stricken interior and *between* stricken counties and government agencies, relief groups and native-place associations in nearby or distant cities along any number of social and official channels, all of which was facilitated and subsidized by a surprisingly willing, if weak, state apparatus. For the remainder of this chapter, we will explore how, based on a variety of official and other sources, these channels of relief played out in an afflicted county south of Beijing based on a traditional set of stages to relief efforts.

Traditional relief chronology

As we will see with the example of Wan County below and other locales explored in the following chapter, the chronology of state or charitable interventions in the grain market in north China over the 1920-21 roughly matched precedents that had been established as far back as the Ming. Traditionally, the structure of a crisis year went as follows: the first vanguard against severe hardship and social unrest due to rising food prices were price stabilization programs using *pingtiao* centers selling subsidized grain at below-market prices, both to make immediate

grain sales more accessible to the poor and taking the pressure off of the grain market at large, where, when *pingtiao* efforts were sufficiently extensive, prices would correspondingly fall for the general public. As nearly twelve months of drought began to have its effect on the north China grain market in the summer of 1920, *pingtiao* programs were launched in parts of the famine zone as early as July. In a more normal year, as the fall harvest materialized, this *pingtiao* activity would normally taper off or cease altogether, having served its purpose in the lean months and weeks leading up to the harvest. But with full or partial harvest failure apparent in over 300 counties in the North in autumn 1920, and the threat of full-fledged famine very real, relief took on several more dimensions, again following Qing precedents: first, *pingtiao* activity generally remained in place across the famine zone into the New Year to benefit "middling" families with cash reserves or some income (from basket-weaving, earth salt production and other pursuits) to spend; second, for those already rendered destitute and unable to profit from *pingtiao* sales, Qing relief regulations "provided a palliative in the form of 'preliminary relief' (*xianzhen*, also called 'emergency relief,' *jizhen*, or 'appeasement relief,' *fuxu*)," as Pierre-Étienne Will explains, "consisting of one month's worth of food distribution on the spot, without distinction between 'very' and 'less' poor." At the same juncture, under the Qing, those residents evidently most vulnerable – normally specified as "widows and orphans" and the "old and weak" and who might not survive the intervening months between this first "emergency relief" and the later "main" relief, which was normally dispensed in the dead of winter leading to the spring harvest – would be "issued rations calculated to last them until the eleventh month."[63] At the outset of famine in 1920, though, counties across Zhili had severely limited amounts of emergency relief funds at hand, a total of $288,500 between 92 counties as of October for an

[63] Will bases this chronology on the stipulations in the Qing-era *zhengshu* (government books) category of traditional Chinese bibliographies, specifically the *huangzheng* (famine administration). Will, *Bureaucracy of Famine*, 129-130.

average of $3,135 available to each, according to Interior Ministry records.[64] As we will see, magistrates in counties across the famine belt convened with local gentry starting in the fall to raise funds locally for the opening of soup kitchens as these initial funds were quickly exhausted, while others failed to do so, and relied, it appears, mostly on relief from outside to carry their residents through the crisis. Many communities, though, relied on a combination of both.

Finally, a word is necessary on what segments of society were meant to be the beneficiaries of official largesse under the Qing. "The administration was essentially interested in helping the peasants," Will explains, "or, more precisely, the unit constituted by the peasant family cultivating a small farm with its own hands," and official instructions "reminded investigators that distributing relief (*zhen*) was not a charitable operation meant to help everyone, but rather just another form of aid to further agricultural production." Transient farmhands and nonagricultural workers, such as craftsmen, were, officially, left to the care of their employers or to providers of private charity, while wage-laborers might be employed on public work-relief projects.[65] As we will see in the following chapters, when relief recipients were identified in the sources in any detail, they were often women, children, and the old and infirm, a fact that applies to gentry-run relief at the village level, relief performed in rural counties by outside organizations like the Buddhist relief society, and in the municipal soup kitchens run by the police and military of the Beijing metropolitan region. Discount cash or grain loan programs, *pingtiao* sales, work-relief and other forms of aid were, however, more broadly accessible, it seems, to the afflicted in both rural and urban settings in 1920-21. The only demographic that appears least likely to have benefited from relief across the board – official and private, foreign

[64] *Zhengfu gongbao*, 28 Oct. 1920.
[65] Will, *Bureaucracy and Famine*, 134, 137.

and native – were single, able-bodied males, a curious exclusion if one of the goals of famine relief was to maintain social stability, a topic we will revisit throughout this study.

Wan County, Zhili, 1920-21

In 1920, with mass harvest failure looming on the horizon for the residents of Wan County, in central Zhili, local authorities added three rooms to a public granary (*cang*) in the northern section of the county, according to the county gazetteer. In early July, the Tianjin daily *Dagong bao* was reporting that magistrate Wang Hongzhuang had responded to a "weak" harvest and rising prices in Wan (which is today called Shunping) by loaning out 2,000 *shi*, possibly 244,000 *jin*, of granary reserves to help carry struggling residents through the summer, after which he planned on restocking the granary. The amount of grain was enough to feed 11,500 people for a month – or 10 percent of the county population.

The public grain facilities magistrate Wang was directing in 1920 dated back centuries, part of an extensive, empire-wide civilian granary system operated by the Qing to stabilize grain prices and guarantee a food supply to its productive, mostly agricultural, population. Under the Qing, county magistrates had occupied the lowest rung of the imperial bureaucracy, overseeing a *yamen* staff set officially at thirteen clerks (in reality they numbered in the hundreds or occasionally thousands) running ten departments, one of which oversaw the system of county granaries. As Bradly Reed explains in his study of the *yamen* of Ba County, Sichuan, clerical duties involved "investigations of all county granaries, relief grain, all documents pertaining to the examination of accounts at the end of [a] magistrate's tenure, and appointment and registration of all granary officials," who often came from the ranks of the local gentry, whose

grain was often used to stock the granaries.[66] In 1877, during the thick of drought famine across north China that was still in living memory in the early Republic, Wan's magistrate had added eight rooms to the county's charity granary, or *yicang*, which, at least according to a 1934 map, lay in a courtyard just to the east of the county government offices. The Wan County gazetteer lists 36 men from villages around the county who, at the close of years of famine in 1880, replenished the county granary with donations of 3,112 *shi* of grain.

In 1920, with granary stocks exhausted and, in the end, a disastrous autumn harvest, Wan County would have to bring in grain from elsewhere to feed a majority of its population of 120,000. Investigators dispatched to the county by Beijing's Buddhist Relief Society reported in the capital's *Shihua* newspaper that land normally reserved for cotton there had been seeded with wheat due to the food situation, and that Wan's crisis ranged from crop devastation in its northeast district to a decent 80 percent harvest in the county's northwest. With little chance in September to restock county granaries, magistrate Wang notified the provincial leadership that the county was purchasing 350 *shi* of wheat and 650 *shi* of millet, for a total of 120,000 *jin*, in Laishui County just inside the Great Wall, *Da gongbao* reported. The grain would reach the rail head at Fangzhunqiao in the southeast corner of Wan County, from which it would travel by cart to county-operated grain discount centers, or *pingtiao ju*, designed to sell grain at more accessible below-market prices to the general public, thereby reining in food prices.[67]

Within weeks, reporters in the capital would spot refugee families from Wan County outside Beijing's Fucheng Gate before they boarded trains for fertile Zhangjiakou, or Kalgan, north of the Great Wall, and the sight of batches of 150 or so men and women from Wan would

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[66] Bradly Reed, *Talons & Teeth: County Clerks & Runners in the Qing Dynasty* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 269.
[67] *Wanxian xinzhi* 1934 1:22a-23b, 9:20b, 9:22a. *Shihua*, 9 Oct. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 7 July 1920. *Da gongbao*, 18 Sept. 1920.

repeat itself in the capital press throughout the winter. With residents fleeing from what was in places a full autumn wheat harvest failure, the Wan County leadership sent agents to Henan and Suiyuan in the middle of November for 10,000 *shi*, or 1,200,000 *jin*, of grain for continued discount sale to the public – enough this time to feed famine rations to some 77,420 people for a month, or roughly two-thirds of the county population at a time when anywhere from 60 to 90 percent of county residents were estimated to be "affected" by the drought, according to an international society.[68]

Here the point should be made that any discussion of state and social response to the famine of 1920 cannot start with the formation of relief societies in the fall. Months earlier, county leaderships across the famine zone – as well in major cities like Beijing, Tianjin, Hankou and Shanghai, which will be discussed in later chapters – had already turned to what was customarily the first defense against soaring prices, grain-price leveling, or *pingtiao*, a practice going back centuries. In other words, the Wan County leadership was not acting alone, but simultaneously with the leaderships of at least three-quarters of the counties afflicted with failed or weak harvests in the summer and fall of 1920. Ding County would establish a charity granary in each of its villages with contribution requirements based on land ownership; in "preparation against disaster and disorder" the Wuqiao County magistrate would release over 27,700 *diao* (strings of 100 coppers or 1,000 cash) in granary funds for the local agricultural association to secure millet "at once" for granary storage; and the magistrate of Guangzong County would set up a *pingtiao* discount grain center in the county seat along with charity granary branches in the surrounding countryside.[69]

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[68] *Fengsheng*, 7 Oct. 1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 4 Dec. 1920. *Shihua*, 17 Jan. 1921. *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 14 Nov. 1920. Edwards, ed., *North China Famine*, map.
[69] *Xiao gongbao*, 3 July 1920. *Da gongbao*, 7 July 1920. *Ding XZ* 1934 3:11b-12a. *Da gongbao*, 21 July 1920. *Da gongbao*, 12 Aug. 1920. *Guangzong XZ* 1933 1:15a.

Despite some scathing commentary to the contrary in reformist publications that Fall,[70] north China's drought of many months was prompting more than handwringing among the ranks of local officials. The funding for these below-market sales was most commonly sourced from local merchant and gentry households with the prodding of the county magistrate,[71] and with granary stocks exhausted, other counties were soon sending agents to procure grain in neighboring provinces – 12,000 *shi*, or 1,440,000 *jin*, of grain from Shanxi and Henan in the case of Zhao County, central Zhili, in late August, and 20,000 *shi*, or 2,400,000 *jin*, of grain in the case of south Zhili's Pingxiang County a month later – to curb rising prices at home with *pingtiao* sales. (This was an especially large project in the case of Pingxiang, which had a population of a little less than 95,000 and had to bring in the grain an additional 22 miles – by cart, presumably – from where it was delivered at the nearest railhead at Xingtai.)[72]

Two November dispatches from south of the provincial border in Henan describe these discount operations in greater detail. In the case of Wuan County (which is today in southwest Hebei) the endeavor comprised 33 teams in both the city and countryside, each with a *pingtiao* branch selling each *jin* of grain at 40-50 *wen* (cash, or 4-5 coppers) cheaper than the market price, a reduction of roughly fifty percent.[73] According to Shanghai's *Celestial Empire*, the *pingtiao* center in Weihui, Henan, was set in the temple of the god of war where the local agricultural association held its meetings. Weihui's magistrate put "gentle (?)[74] pressure on every well-to-do family in the county to contribute according to ability for famine relief," and in "all" the surroundings districts, the

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[70] Perhaps most prominent of these was the October essay by student Yang Zhongjian in the Shanghai news journal *Dongfang zazhi*, "*Bei si sheng zaiqu shicha ji* (Investigation of the disaster zone in four northern provinces)," *Dongfang zazhi*, 10 Oct. 1920, 114-8.
[71] In 1920-21, this was the case in such Zhili counties as Jin, Shenze, Guangzong, Li, Baoding, Ningjin, Xian, Anxin, Mancheng, and Xinhe. *Da gongbao*, 12 Aug. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 18 Sept. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 31 Oct. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 3 Nov. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 14 Nov. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 16 Nov. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 1 Dec. 1920. *Minguo ribao*, 18 Sept. 1920. *Mancheng XZ* 1997, 18. *Xinhe XZ* 1929 1:22a.
[72] *Tianjin zhongmei ribao*, 31 Aug. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 26 Sept. 1920.
[73] *Zhongguo minbao*, 10 Nov. 1920.
[74] The "(?)" appears in the original text, the addition perhaps of an incredulous copy-editor.

correspondent added, magistrates and local gentry "contributed capital" to establish these centers. Pigeons and sparrows were kept from the wheat, which sat in eight-foot high, nine-foot wide woven reed bins, by mats affixed on top. So were the finer palates of the well-to-do, put off by the coarser sorghum with which the grain was debased. The doors of the depôt opened each day at nine in the morning; at a purchase limit of one bushel (35 liters) a day per visitor one to two thousand bushels were sold daily; the earnings were then sent to an unafflicted part of the province to acquire more.[75]

In such a fashion, *pingtiao* operations in at least 74 Zhili counties effected a noticeable drop in food prices by bringing in anywhere from 318,243,800 to 467,641,200 *jin*[76] of grain for discount sale by mid-November 1920, according to Interior Ministry records, using funds raised by local official/gentry circles and $500,000 of "diverted" central state funds.[77] News reports from Harbin in the fertile northeast confirmed the arrival of central government agents there in October to coordinate the acquisition of relief grain for Zhili, Henan and Shandong, reporting a planned purchase of five million *shi* of kaoliang, corn and millet – or 600 million *jin*. So much silver was flooding into Manchuria for these operations that the metal was soon trading at 145 coppers, down from 180 not long before, according to the British consul in Shenyang, noticeably increasing the "cost of living" for foreigners residing in the northeast.[78]

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[75] Pierre-Étienne Will offers an interesting precedent for such a fashion of local fundraising from 1849 Zhili in which a county magistrate gathered all wealthy in a local temple to pressure them to contribute to a relief effort; the ones who refused had that fact posted on their door for all to see but were protected by authorities from any consequence beyond shame. Will, *Bureaucracy and Famine*, 60. A. W. Lochead, "Pingtiao Chu," *Celestial Empire*, 27 Nov. 1920.

[76] Weights and measures varied considerably between provinces and even localities. The above grain total was expressed in four segments: 5,183,600 *jin* (or 600 grams each), 10,220 *dun* (tons, or 1,680 *jin* each), 879,280 *shi* (which was normally converted by the Ministry of Communications in 1920-21 at 160 *jin*, but could range as low as 100 *jin*) and 1,903,770 *bao* (normally converted by the ministry at 160 *jin*, but could also range as low as 100 *jin*).

[77] *Zhonghua minguo shi dang'an ziliao huibian*, 388. *Da gongbao*, 21 July 1920. *Da gongbao*, 18 Sept. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 26 Sept. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 6 Oct. 1920. *Shuntian shibao*, 8 Oct. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 10 Oct. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 13 Oct. 1920. *Shuntian shibao*, 13 Oct. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 24 Oct. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 31 Oct. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 3 Nov. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 5 Nov. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 9 Nov. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 14 Nov. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 16 Nov. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 30 Nov. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 1 Dec. 1920.

[78] *Yuandong bao*, 3 Oct. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 9 Oct. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 16 Oct. 1920. Consul Wilkinson, "Mukden Intelligence Report for March Quarter, 1921," 31 Mar. 1921, FO 228/3290/67.

Pierre-Étienne Will and R. Bin Wong have argued that the Qing civilian granary system had been more effective and longer-lasting than previously recognized, costing the central state anywhere from .5 to 2 percent of its annual revenue from 1700-1850, and that in one stretch of the eighteenth century the system "fed as much as five percent of a provincial population for more than fifteen percent of the year." Tracing its operation up to 1850 (the start of the devastating Taiping rebellion), Will and Wong make the case that the Qing "granary system," whose provisioning and operation was contingent on a healthy symbiosis between official and gentry actors.[79] To put the 1920 Zhili-wide discount grain project into perspective, the upper end of our above range of *pingtiao* grain moving into Zhili in 1920-21 could have provided famine rations of half a *jin* per day to each of Zhili's 30 million residents for a month. This grain, however, had been brought in by 74 of Zhili's 134 counties, which, if roughly broken down proportionally, would have had a little over half –16,567,164 – of the province's 30 million people. So, if we take the middle of the above spread – 392,942,500 *jin* of grain brought into Zhili for *pingtiao* sale by the middle of November 1920 since the beginning of such efforts in August, or three months – it would have amounted to a half *jin* famine ration of grain every day over the period for 8,732,055 people, or 52 percent of the estimated population of these 74 afflicted counties. Zhili's population "affected" by the drought-famine stood at 8,076,500 as of mid-November, according to Tianjin's international relief society,[80] the moment our data for province-wide *pingtiao* volumes ends. It appears, then, that despite the apparent disintegration of central government oversight in the early years of warlord feuding, not only was the civilian granary system still able to feed a huge segment of the rural Zhili population well into the Republic – community granaries and price stabilization efforts that traditionally served as the

[79] Pierre-Étienne Will and R. Bin Wong, *Nourish the People: the State Civilian Granary System in China, 1650-1850* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 481, 497-8, 505-6.
[80] Fuller and Liang, eds., "Statement of Aims," 11.

first vanguard against weak or failed harvests and their attendant social disruptions – but also to an extent that may well have exceeded the performance of the High Qing.

These rural *pingtiao* operations in 1920 were also instrumental, if silent, partners in the first inland relief forays of the international societies that year. Well before joint Chinese and foreign efforts brought in great volumes of relief grain in the spring of 1921, they focused on what was logistically the easiest relief to mobilize and deliver: cash handouts. In December 1920, when an international society distributed $360,266 in silver dollars in Zhili, $50,000 in Henan, $15,000 in Shandong, and $5,000 in Shanxi, these traditional, locally-financed food subsidies at *pingtiao* stations were stretching the purchasing power of relief cash with discounts ranging from ten to fifty percent from prevailing prices. So, presumably, did these discount centers benefit those turning to traditional fallback means of survival, such as basket and mat weaving. Interviews with survivors of the 1920-21 famine conducted by historian Ralph Thaxton relate that stricken residents of the highly saline terrain of south Zhili and north Henan also turned to earth-salt production for cash to feed themselves. One example recounts that "As Yao Zhenxiang, who was fifteen in 1920, recalls, 'Few people in Qian Foji [village, Nanle County, Zhili] died because they relied on salt making to buy grains to eat and sell in other places to get through the famine." In another, salt making "became the principal means whereby half of [Qian Kou village, on the Zhili-Henan border] avoided long-term migration."[81] Cash earned from these endeavors could be stretched – double, in many cases – by securing food at *pingtiao* centers. Then, beyond their goal of stabilizing food prices, the infrastructure that this traditional grain discount system provided was important when in places the effects of full-harvest failure set in: as "these [*pingtiao*] bureaux exist in all the famine districts," *Celestial Empire* continued from Henan in

[81] Ralph A. Thaxton Jr., *Salt of the Earth: The Political Origins of Peasant Protest and Communist Revolution in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 115, 249.

1920, the "machinery is ready" for "any scheme for [free] distribution" to be employed once cash runs out, a fate met by more and more families as the winter wore on.

Once those ordinarily able to survive the winter by themselves were falling into destitution, *pingtiao* efforts were wound down and free relief in Wan County came from at least six sources, according to a relief accounting for 1920 in its Republican gazetteer. In October, the county had started off with a mere $1,000 in emergency relief (*jizhen*) funds, according to the Interior Ministry. (This may have been due to initially low-balling the scale of the disaster: the same source recorded only 19 "heavily-hit villages [*zhongzai cun*]" in the county, and 79 "lightly-hit villages [*qingzai cun*]".)[82] In total, afterwards, the county office is said to have spent a modest $7,000 on relief, which included an unspecified number of soup kitchens and a low-interest pawn office, or *zhidi ju*. Listed next is $729.6 sent in from Taihe, a county in northwest Anhui on the border with Henan, inter-county aid that may be partially explained by the fact that Wan's magistrate, Wang Hongzhuang, was an Anhui native (of Wuhu, near Nanjing). The Shunzhi Disaster Relief Society is next credited with a modest 35 bags (*dai*) of sorghum worth $210; the Zhili Charity Relief Society, or *yizhen hui*, with 750 *shi* of sorghum; and the Buddhist Relief Society with 300 *shi* of millet and 600 sacks (*bao*) of bran. By far the largest relief contribution was 13,393 bags of sorghum worth $80,358 "handled on behalf (*daiban*)" of an unnamed source by a benevolence hall called the Fuyintang.[83] Located downtown by the county government and the chamber of commerce, the Fuyintang crops up again in a section of the gazetteer's religion chapter concerning the county's small Protestant population, where the text goes on to say that in 1920 Protestants "used the drought famine to win adherents" by "carrying countless people" through the year, so it appears this considerable amount of relief in 1920

[82] *Zhengfu gongbao*, 28 Oct. 1920.
[83] *Wanxian xinzhi* 1934 4:25ab, 9:22a. *Shunping XZ* 1999, 17.

originated from the Protestant mission community. Wan County was indeed part of the American Presbyterian Mission field, and as a Protestant charity the Fuyintang – *fuyin*, literally "fortunate sound," was the Chinese term for the gospel, i.e. "the Good News" – would not have been unique to Wan County, appearing in relief capacities elsewhere in the famine field in 1920-21 in locations as far flung as central Zhili's Wuji County, south Zhili's Wei County on the Shandong border, Chang'an County in Shaanxi, and at east Beijing's Horse Market.[84]

But, based on a news brief in *Da gongbao* from early December 1920, local relief in Wan County may not have stopped with the $7,000 spent by the county above: Magistrate Wang Hongzhuang had by then established a soup kitchen in the southern section of the county seat with $3,000 raised locally, but he had also summoned rural gentry to scatter among the county's afflicted villages with the aim of establishing thirty soup kitchens funded through money raised by residents of villages throughout the county that had been "spared disaster."[85] These operations in Wan appeared to follow instructions from the central government earlier in November, when the Interior Ministry ordered all counties with wealth or fair harvests (*fengfu ge xian*) to establish multiple soup kitchens (*duo she zhouchang*).[86] Whether Wan officials and gentry had these orders in mind when setting up their facilities is unclear, but such an operation during time of crisis would have been by no means foreign to Wan County residents, as evidenced by the

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[84] In Wuji County, the Hall established poor workhouses in two villages for locals to learn skills and a soup kitchen in a village serving the old and infirm poor once a day. In Guangzong County, a 100-room orphan home established in the village of South Daxinzhuang by villager Zhang Xiuzhi was funded with some $3,000-4,000 a year in American missionary funds from the Fuyintang in neighboring Wei County. *Wanxian xinzhi* 1934 8:1b-2a. *Guangzong xian jiuzhi jiaozhu* 2001 543. *Da gongbao*, 13 Dec. 1920. *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 5 Dec. 1920. *Beijing baihua bao*, 13 Feb. 1921.

[85] *Da gongbao*, 8 Dec. 1920.

[86] Included in the ministry's instructions (*guiding*) were orders for county officials to conduct investigations of needs in the drought zone and erect shelters to shield refugees from the cold; to tally and report the numbers of residents fleeing to neighboring districts; and erect sufficient *pingtiao* centers in the famine districts. The Zhili government followed in December with orders to all county magistrates to form relief societies (*hanzai xiejin hui*) with local gentry (*shendong*), and, in light of the scarcity of available relief funds from the province, that donations be mobilized from wealthy gentry, as well, for distribution in kind or for the erection soup kitchens. *Zhongguo minbao*, 4 Nov. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 20 Dec. 1920.

county gazetteer's biographical section, which houses numerous examples of local men setting up village soup kitchens and distributing grain in bulk to famine stricken neighbors over the course of the region's worst famine of living memory, that of the 1870s. Back then, one Liu Juchuan was known for "regularly relieving the poor and helpless of his village" of Longtangcun, opening his household granary in 1877 and assisting "many" through the famine. In the village of Jiagezhuang, one Quan Zhangling established a soup kitchen in 1877 for which he released his own grain reserves, sustaining a "multitude" of his village poor through the winter, spring and summer. (Afterwards, in 1880, Quan was credited with urging the county magistrate to assemble county gentry and merchants to pool grain for the county charity granary, himself donating 45 *shi* of grain.) In the village of Guocun, Gao Dangui distributed 100 *shi* of grain to stricken neighbors in 1877 while that same year Liu Xilong was said to have sustained 100 fellow residents of Xiayicun village with grain and money handouts. Then, also that year, Ma Zongzhou used his family's surplus grain to dispense gruel to over 300 people a day for over a year in the village of Chenhoucun, "sparing the death of many of the poor" (later, also in 1880, donating 20 *shi* of grain to the charity granary). And then in 1878, county school official Gao Zhenyu opened a soup kitchen to aid the starving in the village of Kangguancun.[87]

None of this nineteenth-century relief action sheds light, of course, on 1920 activity in Wan County or on, specifically, whether the reported December plan to open thirty feeding facilities in villages around the county was ever carried out. But it prompts us to consider several points that should be borne in mind throughout our exploration of the famine zone in the next chapter.

A first point concerns the fickle nature of this otherwise remarkably useful source, the local gazetteer in its Qing or Republican form. Troves of information on otherwise obscure rural

[87] *Wanxian xinzhi* 1934 6:34ab.

communities, gazetteers are also very limited in what they offer the historian: centuries of local experience are inevitably presented in a highly selective form, and it is worth trying to get into the head of a gazetteer compiler for a moment to consider how the local experience of famine might have entered any particular local history. Often compiled by former officials retired to their home districts, gazetteers, or local histories at the provincial, prefectural, county, and sometimes town/village level, served dually as data-rich handbooks for the governance of a jurisdiction for incoming officials appointed to a new and often strange post in the empire and as cultural and anecdotal almanacs to foster prestige for a locality and/or for particular lineages, etc. For the purpose of seeking out the local experience of any particular humanitarian crisis, gazetteers can offer any number of possible sources, each of which we should mention in turn.

In their Qing, Republican and contemporary forms, gazetteers almost invariably provide year-by-year listings of major local events such as earthquakes, harvest failure or flood, but only in the rarest of instances did compilers include anything beyond a generic statement that "relief was dispensed" in such and such a crisis. More frustrating, perhaps, is the practice of simply crediting "various charitable groups (*ge cishan tuanti*)" with relief without any specification of its volume and origin. In just a few local histories of counties within the 1920 famine zone, such as the Republican gazetteers of Zhili's Cang and Jingxing counties, as we will see below, did these "major event" listings include relief for 1920 in any detail. Then gazetteers might offer sections on county tax and fiscal policy (that is, during harvest failure), and officially-recognized social relief institutions, such as charity granaries and poor shelters, but, even when included, only very rarely would any idea be given of their operation in any particular crisis year researched by the historian.

A useful, but perhaps less obvious, place for tracking down relief activity are the cultural sections of gazetteers, sections that comprise poems, songs and stone stele or grave inscriptions, all of which might house commemorations of humanitarian crises and certain actors instrumental in their relief. When tracking down information on a single event, however, these mostly unindexed sections covering centuries of local culture are regrettably hit or miss. Of equal utility are the biographical sections of gazetteers, which, varying greatly in length, often included sub-sections on the "moral conduct" (*dexing* or *yixing*), "compassion" (*renxu*) or "filial benevolence" (*xiaoyi*) exhibited by villagers or sojourning merchants and posted officials over the centuries.[88] These life stories can offer great detail on village-level responses to humanitarian crises over the centuries, but, since they served the function of an obituary, they also pose the problem, at least for this specific study of 1920-21, that relief actors had not died by the time of their county gazetteer's compilation; biographies were generally written only for the deceased. The fact that the vast majority of Republican-era gazetteers in north China were the fruits of a wave of gazetteer publication occurring with the consolidation of power by the Nationalist regime from 1928 onward means that the 1920 famine was only a decade old when many Republican gazetteers were compiled.

If, then, only glimpses of local relief in the early Republic can be gleaned from these sections, they do at least show that the 1920 famine appeared in a very particular social context

[88] Pierre-Étienne Will's description of these sources is well-worth noting here: "In many cases, private contributions (*juan*) were a matter of simple charity (*shan*). By this I mean that beyond the apparent sociopolitical objectives of these acts – defusing antagonisms, strengthening the social legitimacy of the ruling classes – one must see them as the expression of a more general tradition of communal 'altruism,' imbued no doubt with strong Buddhist connotations. The biographical chapters of local gazetteers almost always devote long sections to those who used to perform 'acts of benevolence' (*yixing*), as well as to the so-called 'lovers of charity' (*le shan*). Some of the latter – who were not necessarily rich or else ruined themselves in this pursuit – became virtual specialists in 'hidden acts of charity' (*yinde*), which is to say, anonymous charitable acts, a specifically Buddhist notion implying not immediate social recognition but a deferred 'retribution' (*bao*) that might even be saved for a later life or for one's descendents. The concept of *shan*, translated as 'charity,' was more a Buddhist formulation, as against the strongly Confucian motion of *yi* (justice, equity, benevolence); but both terms were used almost interchangeably in the texts that interest us here." Will, *Bureaucracy and Famine*, 138.

in Wan and, as we will see, elsewhere across the disaster zone, in which mutual aid by stricken communities and paternalistic charitable acts by those of means were very much still in living memory. In other words, outside agents from missionary, Buddhist or Beijing relief societies in 1920-21 were performing social relief that spoke to preexisting indigenous relief cultures that persisted in varying degrees of efficacy. In some cases these outsiders worked with local operations, in others parallel to them, and in still others filled the vacuum left by their collapse. It is the task of the following chapter to explore to what degree these traditions were active in places across the North in 1920-21.

Chapter Two

The Zone: county and village-level relief, 1920-21

When residents of central Zhili's Wan County faced famine conditions in 1920, as we saw in the last chapter, they had at their disposal an indigenous repertoire of relief practices such as charity granaries and soup kitchens that had been active among local figures as recently as the 1870s, that is, within living memory. Incoming relief in 1920 along missionary or philanthropic networks from China's major cities constituted then an added relief dimension to a pre-existing charity relief inheritance, a third leg of a triangular relief operation consisting of the interplay of household-level village relief, official relief (from the county level on up to the central state) and outside extragovernmental charities.

This chapter explores to what extent these various levels of relief were active in a swathe of the famine zone from the mountains of Shanxi to Zhili's section of the north China plain bordering Shandong. The main goal here is to explain how in fact so many fewer people died than might have been expected in 1920-21. To do this, we will include gazetteer-based evidence of charity relief precedents set by residents of particular localities over the famine zone with the aim of tracing continuities in indigenous north China charity relief activity stretching back from 1920 into the late imperial period. This inclusion is aimed at meeting a second goal of this chapter, which is to demonstrate the limits of the notion of dynastic decline, at least through the important test of relief administration, which had been a major achievement of the early modern Qing bureaucracy and local elites around the empire. We will find village-level grain handout programs and county-level soup kitchen activity in rural Zhili, Shanxi and elsewhere operating independently from missionary or urban relief society contributions, and, no less, in both

moderately and hard-hit sections of the drought zone. But just as our discussion of Wan County in the last chapter was meant in part to introduce some of our key types of sources for this overall study, here, at the start of our tour of the famine zone, we should first attempt to give some legibility to the social and political dynamic driving society in rural north China.

The rural dynamic

The agricultural regime in north China in the late imperial and Republican periods resulted in important differences from the lusher south of the country, where multiple harvests throughout the year invited larger investments in agricultural land and tenancy was correspondingly high. In contrast, an average of only fifteen percent of land in northern villages was worked by tenant farmers, while the vast majority of farmland was possessed by owner-cultivators with, in the case of Hebei (formerly Zhili), Henan and Shandong in the 1930s, an average of 22 *mu*, or roughly 3.33 acres, of land per household. Northern villages, then, consisted of an average of one hundred, mostly poor households with a considerably smaller proportion of wealthy gentry and literati than their southern counterparts. In the late imperial period, and into the Republic, villages were neither discrete, autonomous entities nor were they political units fully incorporated into the state administration above. In his classic 1964 study "Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China," based on fieldwork in 1940s Sichuan, anthropologist William Skinner theorized that the "culture-bearing unit" of traditional China was not the village but the community that coalesced around a cluster of villages and local markets, a social unit over which administrative and commercial zones overlapped. Skinner's classic work, which has not gone without its critics in the half century since its appearance, nevertheless provides legibility to the rural Chinese social dynamic, allowing us to map out the social

landscape of the typical Chinese villager, one that was largely determined by the paths to market.[1]

In his study of six villages in Zhili and Shandong's section of the north China plain, Prasenjit Duara provided further legibility to north China's subcounty *political* sphere through what he termed a "cultural nexus of power," the series of informal connections and relationships – both horizontal and vertical and founded on cultural representations of authority, not formal office – that a person or a group, such as a temple organization or an entire village, used for "public" goals: initiating and negotiating small-scale irrigation works, local defense, or holding temple fairs doubling as sites of local commerce. At the lowest echelons of political life, where market zones overlapped with the discrete jurisdictions of the bureaucratic hierarchy, a man or his village's standing or reach in the local nexus determined access to resources from water rights and tax immunity to brides.[2]

Henrietta Harrison has, in turn, shown how modern-style newspapers, while informing China's major urban populations and mobilizing relief from them, were not essential to the transmission of news along great distances: rural informational currents included letters sent home from sojourning students and merchants, or the oral news network moving along the cart ruts left by farmers and itinerant monks and peddlers crisscrossing Skinner's market communities. "Surprisingly detailed accounts were also passed on by word of mouth," Henrietta Harrison observes in her study of newspapers and rural nationalism based on the diaries of a member of the Shanxi gentry. In one instance, a bookseller in 1901 visiting a Shanxi village from

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[1] The average market-community size in rural China, according to Skinner – that is, the effective social field of the farmer – was 18 villages of 1,500 households spread over 50 square kilometers, with an 4.5-kilometer average walk to town. Where settlement was at its sparsest, in arid or mountainous regions, the market-community might cover 185 sq. km. with 8.5 km walk into town; the densest extreme in "plains of exceptional fertility" was a 9 sq. km field with two kilometers to walk to town. G. William Skinner, "Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China," 24/1 *Journal of Asian Studies* (Nov. 1964), 32.

[2] Duara, *Culture, Power and the State*, 11, 16, 56-67.

a nearby market town reported to a prominent villager the "numbers of people attending a famine relief station there on three different dates that month." "Newspaper news did not simply replace oral reports," Harrison explains, "but became a part of the existing network of communications" over which news of war, bandit raids, or relief measures travelled.[3] The work of all three scholars help explain apply to how relief needs could be ascertained and fulfilled on the most local level.

A variety of local figures in various capacities were active in the local relief measures reviewed below, and – aside from merchants and humble farmers and tradesmen – magistrates and gentry figure largest in our narrative. When conducting local administration, county magistrates, who had occupied the lowest level of the imperial bureaucracy for most of the Qing, were joined after 1900 by the figure of the village head, a product of last-ditch administrative "New Policy" reforms by the ailing dynasty. During turn-of-the-century times of crisis, village heads were assisted in informal capacities by local gentry, a term we examined briefly in our last chapter, as well as by non-degree holding residents of varied economic means aspiring to gentry-status by performing public duties for the community. Since the dynasty had collapsed a mere nine years before the start of our famine, many of the gentry still active in the countryside presumably held Qing degrees of some sort or another in 1920, and, while these degrees served no official function or accreditation in the Republic, they remained cultural signifiers of integrity and even-handedness, as Henrietta Harrison has shown in her larger study of the life trajectory of the same member of the rural Shanxi gentry examined in her study of news networks. The life experience of Liu Dapeng, a man of modest to poor means whose long life straddled the late Qing and Republican periods, is worth briefly mentioning here. The competence and moral

[3] Henrietta Harrison, "Newspapers and Nationalism in Rural China 1890-1919," *Past and Present* 166 (2000), 190, 204.

qualities associated with Confucian training were particularly favored when choosing relief administrators in times of disaster or when establishing commercial ties or extending credit to strangers on trust. Working as a tutor for a wealthy family in the Shanxi town of Nanxi, Liu Dapeng had been tasked by his private employers with distributing relief to villagers during the drought famine of 1901; a holder of a provincial civil degree, Liu's social role as an "upright Confucian gentleman, the reputation for integrity and financial even-handedness that this generated, and the concern with finance and accounting that went with it," all allowed him, well into the 1920s, to play a consistently key role as a mediator reorganizing native banks or settling disputes between various chambers of commerce, suggesting a practical esteem for his type in rural circles well into the Republic.[4]

Tutor or schoolmaster positions had long been filled by degree-holding gentry of modest, if not impoverished, means; in the early 1900s, a more officially defined education sector became a common destination for literati unable to secure new positions of local governance such as the new village head, which was often filled by more powerful or connected members of the community.[5] In other examples throughout this chapter we will see links between education officials, likely from the ranks of local literati, and relief administration at the village and county level in 1920-21. What this suggests is that as village governance was reconfigured in late Qing reforms and during the Republic with the creation of village heads, police officers and other formal agents of the state, village elites taking on informal or peripheral roles in the political life of their communities were, in numerous places across the 1920 famine field, still active in customary relief tasks such as initiating or managing soup kitchens, charity credit programs, and grain subsidies at this most local – village or household – level. As we will see, this continued

[4] Harrison, *Man Awakened*, 40, 127.
[5] Huaiyin Li, *Village Governance in North China, 1875-1936* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 148.

viability of neighborly relief efforts in sections of the north China drought zone of 1920 should help explain how considerable relief was flowing "below the radar" of outside observers that year, and how many more rural residents were kept alive through the year than might have been expected considering the inadequate showing of the cash-strapped central state apparatus in Beijing.

This appearance of the village head also marked the first formal penetration of village politics by China's modern state and it would have major consequences for the village dynamic. Duara charts the breakdown of the traditional nexus with the creation of the village as a tax unit in the 1910s and the appearance of entrepreneurial tax brokers with no personal investment in the welfare of local communities, replacing the protective role that local elites had taken traditionally – for their own advantage as much as their neighbors' – with an impersonal and extractive one. While Duara is correct in his description of the fate of the old nexus, this chapter will show that its accelerated breakdown was a function of the heightened state extractions used to finance the inter-provincial wars of the mid-1920s – and, later on, to pay for the modernization drives of the Nationalist and, in places, the Japanese occupation. As Huaiyin Li explains in his study of village governance in Huailu County in central Zhili, at the time of our famine the "village head post was [still] a desirable one that attracted the prestigious and powerful in the community," and only later in the mid-1920s, half a decade after our famine, did local elites begin to shun the increasingly extractive and therefore contentious position of village head *en masse*, a position that was "primarily responsible for [allocating] the additional tax burden imposed on the village by a sudden increase in irregular levies and military imposts."[6] This revised timeline is borne out by evidence provided throughout this chapter of the continued relief contribution and, in some cases, leadership of village elites in the Shanxi, Henan and Zhili

[6] *Ibid*., 147.

famine field of 1920-21. In other words, rural northern communities, well into the Republic, were considerably more attentive to social welfare and community cohesion than has been previously recognized.

Late imperial Cang County, Zhili

Returning to university from vacation in late summer 1920, Yu Bingxiang left home in Cang County, some 60 miles south of Tianjin, for an investigative tour of his county and the surrounding area, much of which faced the prospect of full-fledged famine in the winter. Assuming a public role like many other students over the course of the crisis whose reports appeared in prominent publications nationwide, Yu reported in the major Beijing daily *Chenbao* that his native county had seen only dry skies since the spring, locust invasions on the withered wheat and sorghum crops, and fifty "bandits" roaming the county, robbing village bourses of cash "in broad daylight."[7]

Located roughly in the center of the north China plain, Cang has long rested on a well-trod thoroughfare linking the capital region with the lower Yangzi delta to the south. For centuries this consisted primarily of the Grand Canal, which, passing through the county seat, was more or less replaced in 1910 by a rail line running roughly the same distance. Arteries of trade activity, these infrastructural blessings over the centuries came with the curse of travelling armies. While bandits from the fringes of society were an age-old scourge in parts of north China, the line between such outlaws and, say, disbanded soldiers was a thin one; the "bandits" to which student Yu was referring in all likelihood included soldiers from the army division of commander Long Jiguang, men who, reportedly unpaid and "starving," had retreated to out-of-the-way Yanshan County in southeast Zhili from defeat in the brief July war between north

[7] *Chenbao*, 28 Sept. 1920.

China's rival provincial military factions – fighting that would soon spiral into the full-scale warlordism of the 1920s. As late as October and in groups of three hundred the soldiers were reportedly "plundering" Cang and adjacent counties, going so far as to "execute" members of wealthy households, leading the magistrate of neighboring Qingyun County to order villages to buy off the soldiers with cash and grain – this amid the pinch of severe food scarcity.[8]

Half of Cang's northern district was a disaster zone, according to medical investigators of the Tianjin branch of the Chinese Red Cross who toured the county in the fall, and three-quarters of its southern parts, totaling 242 directly affected villages and 50,000 in dire need of relief – a low figure given the total county population of some 400,000, but a figure that would rise steadily in the coming months. Thousands of livestock had been sold off. And a group of 200 men and women from thirty Cang households who reportedly appeared in Beijing in October, where they were met by garrison soldiers and escorted to a refugee shelter set up outside the capital's Zuoan Gate, were but a fraction of the several thousand who had already fled in search of food.[9]

Cang was not the worst-hit of Zhili counties in 1920-21, but the relative wealth of journalistic and gazetteer information available for the county provides a good entry point to the famine field as well as to the broader experience of late imperial and Republican disaster relief in north China as a whole. In addition to the unprecedented pressures and challenges of a new economic and political world order in which residents of the foundling Chinese Republic found themselves in 1920, they also faced a harrowingly familiar humanitarian crisis in a spiral of ecological and infrastructural decline stretching back many decades. Indeed, as was the case in Wan County, one of the world's greatest famines was still in living memory in Cang – the great

[8] *Zhongguo minbao*, 6 Oct. 1920.
[9] *Da gongbao*, 14 Oct. 1920. *Fengsheng*, 20 Oct. 1920.

drought famine of the late 1870s – and Cang's experience of this catastrophe as recorded in its local history is worth exploring for any precedent it might have set for relief response in our famine of 1920.

A second reason to explore these gazetteer biographies at the outset of our study of the famine zone is the fact that they paint a picture of a corner of the north China plain that does not square with our current understanding of the broader relief culture of late imperial north China. Surprisingly little literature exists on relief efforts during the great north China famine of the 1870s, especially in the politically-central province of Zhili, which encircled the capital region and the major northern port of Tianjin. What does exist indicates that apart from aid from southern China, from (mostly British) missionaries, and from an ailing Chinese dynasty, next to nothing in the area of mutual-aid was generated within stricken communities themselves.[10] This glaring absence of local, private relief activity – that is, neighbors assisting neighbors – fits neatly into the broader historical narrative provided by current scholarship on food policy and famine relief over the centuries in north China, a narrative in which the imperial state apparatus has occupied virtually the entire stage.[11] The most recent of these studies, Lillian Li's *Fighting Famine in North China*, charts the subject's *longue-durée* in the province of Zhili as follows: relief – be it grain-price leveling (*pingtiao*) operations, the establishment of charity granaries, or cash handouts to the poor and famished – went from being the domain of local officialdom in the Ming and early Qing to being that of the central state in the 1700s, only to devolve back into the concern of county magistrates amid nineteenth century dynastic decline. By 1900, Li explains, "charitable institutions [that] were privately funded" in Zhili's rural counties "were mostly

[10] For the conspicuous absence of northern non-state relief in otherwise excellent studies, see Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London: Verso, 2001), 64-79; and Edgerton-Tarpley, *Tears From Iron*, 42-66, 131-55.
[11] See Will, *Bureaucracy and Famine*, and Li *Fighting Famine*.

initiated and sponsored by local magistrates." Alluding to a formerly heated debate on the possibility, or even applicability, of a Habermasian "civil society" or "public sphere" in late imperial China, Li cautions against mistaking private financing of charity in the North at the dawn of the twentieth century for "signs of the new elite activism, or perhaps even of a type of civil society," since, she maintains, "almost all the voluntary activities that originated in the north were sponsored by officials, or coordinated with officials." It follows then that social relief in the North at the end of the Qing should, as Li concludes, properly "be regarded as 'government-sponsored, gentry-managed' civic activities."[12] In this recent, important work on famine policy, northern charity culture thus appears as sickly as its famished subject, effectively non-existent in comparison with the vibrant culture of private charity relief in the lower Yangzi society, which, stretching back to at least the late Ming, culminated in a modern-era re-flowering and projection into the North during the 1870s famine and afterwards.[13]

In his study of famine relief in Zhili during the High Qing period of the 1700s, Pierre-Étienne Will provides a different take on the extent and nature of relief activity at the most local level, painting a hands-off role by the state, a sphere of activity in which "local custom" ruled and the officials might perform "spot-checks," endorsements, and confer rewards. "The fact that appeals for private funds and charitable initiatives, and indeed for the organizational abilities of the elites, went hand in hand with purely administrative endeavors can never be stressed enough," he writes on Zhili under the Qing. "Only the relative shares of the two elements varied considerably from period to period and from region to region." The problem comes down to which sources one relies on. "It is tempting to view the 'contributions' that the rich and the gentry were asked to make as a desirable but by no means strictly necessary supplement; this is

[12] Li, *Fighting Famine*, 222, 281.
[13] Rankin, *Elite Activism*. Zhu, *Difangxing liudong*.

the impression conveyed by a text like the *Zhenji*," Will writes, using the example of a famine relief report composed by a magistrate in Anhui in the early 1600s that developed into a major policy paper for famine relief administration. "But the reverse is attested more often in the historical record," Will adds, particularly when one reviews the biographical sections of county gazetteers where one finds "situations in which the administration proved powerless to master a crisis and in which private intervention, at best supervised and initiated by the bureaucracy, took the lead."[14]

Fortunately, biographies of exemplary local men were evidently important to the compilers of Cang County's gazetteer of 1933 for they encompass several hundred pages, and among them one finds county native Sun Yingjia who, along with his brothers, was said to have "exhausted the family stores of millet" in the late 1870s to relieve the many in the area reduced to gathering leaves for food. As head of the household after his father's death, Sun reportedly set up soup kitchens and handed out winter clothes "every year," while performing other philanthropic acts (*shanju*) for the poor, using profits from the family's farming, mulberry and other trades. Similarly, with "villagers leaving in all directions to beg for food" in 1876, one Yan Yutang is said to have carried a hundred families in his village through the year with rice and millet handouts. When farmers "all around" lacked seed for spring planting the following year, Yan distributed his seed stock to the poor "with recipients coming from far and near in an endless stream." Yan reportedly "spared no effort" to assist poor fellow villagers who lacked the funds to marry or have proper funerals and burials, "showing exceptional pity on the orphaned and widowed."[15]

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[14] Will, *Bureaucracy and Famine*, 137.
[15] *Cang XZ* 1933 8:175a, 8:177a.

In this same Cang County source some names appear only in passing in a benevolence chart (*xiaoyi biao*) listing men beside their good deeds over the course of the troubled nineteenth century. Among these, Sun Yongqian is listed simply as having "dispensed congee and saved the poor during the famine years of the early Guangxu reign," that is, the late 1870s. Other lives are recounted in considerably more depth, such as that of Liu Fengwu, whose biography begins with his father, a Qing policing official, who was said to have instilled frugality in his children and "regarded the devotion of surplus family wealth to social welfare as a personal mission." "Every disaster year" the family erected soup kitchens (*she zhouchang*) with resources the family provided, "saving untold numbers of the stricken." Passing the torch onto his son, Fengwu, the boy is said to have "zealously sought out to perform acts of charity and continue his father's legacy (*neng ji fu zhi*)."[16] In his late teens during the flood year 1833, Fengwu contributed to relief efforts (*zhu zhen*) with a donation of 600 taels of white gold, an act for which he was decorated by the state. Many years later in 1876 Fengwu erected soup kitchens (*she chang*) and sold grain at a discount to stabilize prices (*pingtiao*) with expenses of $10,000 before setting up winter shelters for the masses of refugees, dividing the men and women, shelters that operated through the spring when the refugees were given money by him to return to their fields. With drought persisting in 1877 Fengwu assigned a name to his refugee shelter operation, the Yanxitang, or Hall of Extended Rest, which took in 8,000 men and women and issued funds for the proper burial of those who had perished on the roads, stamping names on the coffins so families could locate deceased kin. The biography relates that, in all, this Cang native spent

[16] The example of a father-to-son transmission of charitable endeavors over the same period elsewhere on the north China plain is recounted (curiously, using an identical expression) in the gazetteer biography of a resident of Wei County, Zhili, on the border with Shandong. There one Sang Rujun was said to have issued grain and money during the famine year 1879, which sustained 170 households that "could not support themselves," a practice he regularly did by feeding "several hundred" desperately poor neighbors by providing them a meal a day. Sang was said to have been "continuing the legacy of his father" (*neng ji fu zhi*), Sang Kai, a national university student (*jiansheng*) who earlier in the century had donated 43 mu of land for the funding of repairs on local buildings and, in 1813, relieved fellow villagers with 10 *shi* of millet and 200 strings of 1,000 cash. *Wei XZ* 1929 16:38b.

$14,000 and donated 1,000 *shi* of rice in relief to the poor in 1877 alone before it details other charitable acts up to his death in 1893. And Liu Fengwu was apparently a figure to turn to in times of disaster for he crops up in the biography of another Cang resident, Zhu Yuanxiang, who in his own biography was said to have approached Liu to urge him to initiate and fund the above 1876 soup kitchen operation while working with Liu to establish his Hall of Extended Rest.[17]

These biographies suggest that, while overall relief responses were woefully inadequate across the North in the 1870s disaster, it was not the case that members of stricken communities, at least in this major Zhili county, did little of consequence to assist the famished in their midst. When, in her study of famine relief over the centuries, Lillian Li writes of this event that "The great drought struck a rural society in Zhili already bereft of any reserves or resources," she neglects to explore the possibility that, in at least some cases, scarcity may have been a function of grain expended in mutual-assistance measures, and that years of back-to-back harvest failure made replenishment impossible. [18] The stories of these men from the late 1870s are also important for our present study because, in addition to the tradition of famine songs and laments transmitted orally between generations (examined by Kathryn Edgerton-Tarpley in her work on the 1870s famine), they provided stricken communities with a written record of how officialdom and local notables had responded to previous crises. One purpose of these stories was of course to exalt their subjects – a posthumous reward on top of those received in their lifetimes, such as official proclamations of praise regularly posted above the doors of charitable households and other awards conferred by the state. But these public records also set a standard of activism and generosity to which later generations might be held, specifically families of means (better yet,

[17] *Cang XZ* 1933 8:464b, 8:166b-167a, 8:187a.
[18] Li, *Fighting Famine*, 272.

those with generous forebears) to whom magistrates and concerned residents might appeal for contributions in future crises.

Here we might need to perform a more extensive review of Cang biographies to determine the degree of direct state involvement in relief affairs at the sub-county level. Biographies of local men over the centuries in the Cang gazetteer of 1933 are indeed stocked with *singular* acts of alms distribution, some expressed as donations to general "relief," or *zhenji*, which, consistent with Li's characterization of northern humanitarian culture as one rooted in or led by state policy and practice, suggest the existence of larger, probably official, relief operations to which elite activity was subservient.[19] But, if we consider another relief phenomenon that threads its way through centuries' worth of Cang biographies – the dispensing of congee in *zhouchang*, or soup kitchens, truly the most direct form of poor relief – the record presents, in fact, a picture of persisting famine relief activity initiated and executed by local men acting as heads of households or caretakers of their afflicted communities acting in the extragovernmental capacity suggested by Will.

Will alluded to the sheer number of gentry-run relief stations in rural Zhili when he pointed out that "Theoretically only five" official relief centers existed "per county in the Qing

[19] By way of example, Li Huancai twice distributed 1,600 *shi* of millet to war refugees during the chaos of the Taiping and Nian rebellions of the Xuanfeng and Tongzhi reigns (1851-1874); in the town of Tongjuzhen, one Cheng Yuzao gave out 300 *shi* of millet from his reserves to the area poor in 1852, issued 30 *shi* of sorghum during famine in 1879, and donated 20 *shi* of grain to the local charity granary Liu Yigiu answered an official call for relief donations from merchants and gentry when the province of Zhili was struck by disaster in 1833 with an "extremely large donation"; Lan Zhiqing saved "many" local residents during a major drought in 1831 by issuing "several hundred" *shi* of grain; in Dongjiazhuang village Dong Yanyi financed work on the village dyke that "spared the area flooding for decades"; later in the famine year 1831 he gave out relief in the surrounding countryside; Ma Longtu was said to have relieved the poor with donations in 1831; Dong Qingbiao donated to relief in1831 before giving out 1,000 *shi* of grain after a disastrous flood the following year; Wang Hao, senior licentiate, during famine in 1763 with brothers and uncles issued several hundred *shi* of millet in relief to neighbors; Wang Qiaozi, prefectural graduate of the first degree, was said to "readily assist the poor"; in the famine year 1703 in a single day of handouts to his neighbors he exhausted his grain stores of several hundred *shi*; Zhao Sheng under the Ming in 1441 donated 1,000 *shi* of millet to a relief effort after a locust infestation and flood; Rong Ji in 1191 during the Jurchen Jin dynasty issued 700 *shi* of rice; 300 strings of 1,000 cash coins; and 2,000 bundles of firewood to relieve those weakened by famine. *Cang XZ* 1933 8:118a, 8:119a, 8:135b, 8:153a, 8:155ab, 8:157b, 8:161a, 8:165ab.

period, one in the administrative town and four (one in each direction) in the surrounding *xiang*," or rural districts. "Ideally," though, "a large district would have several hundred soup kitchens" feeding a few hundred people each, many such facilities being "designed first and foremost to help the poorest people survive until public distributions could begin" as well as "after the public distributions ended, which was almost always before the year's first harvest." These gentry-run feeding centers also assisted the non-farming, non-student populations largely excluded from administrative relief. Will mentioned that he "could cite a hundred examples" of such activity, but, in his study of the central state bureaucracy, he chose to stop at one instance from 1779 Zhongxiang County, Zhili.[20] In order to achieve some legibility to what transpired in the famine districts of north China in the modern period, we might as well run through a handful of such phenomena in Cang County over the centuries.

In Cang one finds a senior licentiate named Yuan Yinyuan who, with "those begging for food clogging the roads" in the famine year (*sui da ji*)[21] of 1870, pooled together 3,000 *shi* of grain – upwards of 200,000 kilos – with his brothers and set up soup kitchens (*she zhouchang*) for the starving "on which countless relied for their survival." During the previous Daoguang

[20] Will, *Bureaucracy and Famine*, 139-142.

[21] Translations hereafter specify the word for "hunger" or "famine" in order to make an important point on syntax and what it says about the priorities of the social class compiling and consuming local histories. "Local gazetteers usually list crises, but generally only major events…" Li writes. "The social consequences of such disasters are described less frequently than one might expect. In the Qing gazetteers, hunger and mortality are explicitly mentioned only infrequently." Indeed, Li's observation may apply if one limits one's search to the more obvious "go-to" gazetteer sections on disaster management touched on above – year-by-year listings of major local events and sections on official relief programs and social relief institutions. But by limiting oneself to these sections one risks reducing north China relief to that employed by a depersonalized state apparatus, mistaking official and officially-mandated measures for *all* north Chinese relief activity in times of disaster. This is more than an issue of data collection for it touches on the whole tone of Qing-era humanitarianism. It is in the biographical sections of gazetteers where the word *ji*, or hunger/starvation, most appears, as opposed to *huang* (disaster) or *qian* (weak harvest), which have broader implications for multiple levels of society – financial, fiscal, social as well as humanitarian – and thus appear more commonly, as Li points out, in listings of major events. In other words, in the poorer North, which has produced far fewer literati diaries than the more developed Yangzi delta (allowing historians to more readily get into the heads of *southern elites*, as Joanna Handlin Smith has expertly done in her work on late Ming charity), it is in the biographical entries and tombstone inscriptions of local histories where the human element stands out. Li, *Fighting Famine*, 34.

reign (1820-50), one Lan Yingkui, a graduate of the first degree, was said to have "made it a regular practice of his" to issue millet to stabilize prices (*chu su pingtiao*) during years of weak harvest, serve congee (*shifang zhou*) to the needy "at the end of each year", and "issue" millet to the stricken during times of famine. Wang Hengtai, who had founded two charity schools in his village in 1828, "kept alive several hundred families" from his village and those around by setting up soup kitchens (*kaishe zhouchang*) two years later during famine (*sui ji*), a facility that ran from the spring through the winter; when refugees "from afar" crowded into the city begging for food, he issued 500 *shi* of grain in relief. Similarly, Chen Guilin "saved countless" of the starving through an 1832 famine (*sui ji*) with congee made with his own millet reserves (*chu su fang zhou*). During famine years in the Qing Daoguang reign (1820-50), Gong Baotai, a senior licentiate who moved from Cang County to Shaguantun village in neighboring Qing County, is said to have given out alms (*shi she*) of congee, cotton clothes, medicine, and meat dumplings, later initiating the establishment of a town charity granary in Xingjizhen, which lies on the Cang County border, with an initial grain donation, "saving the lives of many."[22]

In the same period, Yu Heling from the town of Zhuanhezhen "repeatedly" gave out 200 *shi* of millet in relief (*zhuzhen*) in 1831 before donating (*juanzhen*) 1,200 silver taels to relief efforts four years later. When bandits raided the area in 1867 toward the end of the tumultuous Taiping and Nien rebellions and "several hundred [or] thousand families"[23] sought refuge in his town, "most of whom" were reportedly without food, Yu and his brothers set up thirty cauldrons from which they served congee for over a month, "sustaining several hundred [or] thousand people over the course of the crisis." The following year Yu again gave out 200 *shi* of millet to the starving. Finally, in the "inauspicious" (*da jin*) years of the late 1870s , Yu donated another

[22] *Cang XZ* 1933 8:146b, 8:151b, 8:155a, 8:170b, 8:171b. *Qing XZ* 1931: 8 section B:39a.
[23] This figure is rendered twice in the entry as "*shu bai qian*" as opposed to the more common Chinese numerical rendering "*shu shi wan*" and it is unclear whether the source meant several ten, or several hundred, thousand people.

200 *shi* of millet to relief efforts (*zhuzhen*), dispensing "special assistance" to his village's poor families in the form of capital goods.[24]

Reaching back into the 1790s, with refugees "filling the roads" in flight during major famine (*da ji*) in the waning years of the Qianlong reign, Xing Shenghui set up soup kitchens (*she zhouchang*) in his village of Xingjiazhuang that fed "several hundred refugees," operations that consumed 150 *shi* of rice from October through the end of the year. The biographical entry for a man active in the same decade, Gu Shiqi, reads in its entirety that "in the 57th year of Qianlong's reign (1791), a famine year, he cooked congee as relief; in the 4th year of Jiaqing (1799), a year of weak harvest, he did as well." In "famine years" (*sui ji*) during the long Qianlong reign (1735-96), one Ma Shiji is said to have served congee (*shi zhou*) and distributed clothes. During a major famine (*da ji*) in 1702, senior licentiate Zhang Xu cooked congee for the starving for four months with a "large donation of his own capital." That same year, with refugees flooding in "like ants" into Cang County after a river broke its banks, Wang Zhikun served millet congee for their relief.[25]

Examples in this Cang gazetteer of this tradition of serving congee to the needy by rural actors stretches back to at least the beginning of the seventeenth century: one Zhang Errui, a military man, dispensed congee as relief "in years of famine after repeated crop failure" during the reign of Kangxi (1661-1722) and is said to have given out "several hundred" *shi* of grain when floods destroyed fields and farmhouses, as well as gold and reeds for the construction of huts for refugees. In the drought-famine year (*sui han daji*) of 1689, senior licentiate Wu Zhongqu cooked congee (*zhu zhou*) as relief with 600 *shi* of his own grain, and for the dead gave out coffins and set up charity graveyards (*zhi yi meng*) for their proper burial. Then one Wang

[24] *Cang XZ* 1933 8:158ab.
[25] *Cang XZ* 1933 8:131b, 8:138a, 8:144a, 8:179a.

Yong established a Baohuitang, or Hall of Precious Compassion, to "assist the poor" (*yi ji pin*), through which he "donated materials for the dispensing of congee during years of crisis, saving unknown numbers of people" and provided free tea on the roadside "for the benefit of passing pedestrians;" later, Wang Yong's "generous example" reportedly moved a man named Wang Bishan to donate a "huge sum" of gold to help Wang Yong establish a charity ferry. Luo Yugao, an assistant magistrate elsewhere after testing well on the civil exams, was also credited with founding the Hall of Precious Compassion together with Wang Yong in order to "assist the poor," and had previously donated 1,000 *shi* of grain when floods in the area forced many to roam in search of food, saved "a huge amount of people." [26] Finally, during a "weak harvest" in 1609 one Yang Shifan dispensed congee (*shi zhou*) to "assist the starving, saving many lives" before "establishing a charity society" (*li yishe*) later on to school impoverished scholars and setting up charity land with which to support poor kin, presumably for them to farm rent-free or at a fraction of the market rate.[27]

Several things can be taken from this run-through of biographies from central Zhili men active through the late Ming and Qing. Relief at the local level was not limited to event-specific or small-scale activity but was in some cases said to have been organized every year between harvests, when the poor were most vulnerable, or have provided for several, even many, thousand people over the course of a crisis. Then in terms of agency, soup kitchens operated

[26] Neither of the biographies mentioning the creation of the Hall of Precious Compassion includes a reign name, but they do lie beside biographies of men active under Kangxi (1661-1722). Although the Hall's founding period is then uncertain, the appearance of a nonofficial charity institution in the Kangxi era would fit into the timeline provided by Fuma Susumu and Joanna Handlin Smith in their studies of early modern Chinese charity, one in which China's first recorded benevolence society, founded in Henan in 1590, was soon followed by others in the commercializing and literati-rich region of the Lower Yangzi. Cang's example suggests that the trend of organizing charity into semi-permanent institutions by local activists may have soon made its way north into rural Zhili, as well. Smith, *The Art of Doing Good*, 43-6. Fuma, *Zhongguo shanhui*.

[27] The source does not specify how this land was used, but historian Huaiyin Li gives an example of charity land set aside for clan use in Huailu County considerably later in 1900 in which over seventy *mu* was "divided into fifteen pieces and leased to clan members for a rent just one-tenth of the market rate." *Cang XZ* 1933 8:119b, 8:123ab, 8:125b, 8:126a. Li, *Village Governance*, 149.

without explicit state involvement nor did they require explicit association with named voluntary societies but were often associated with individuals – often men with degrees and salaries conferred by the state who were acting privately in their home districts where they were prohibited by law from serving in most official posts – or with sets of brothers within a household. Finally, when the beneficiaries of relief were identified in these accounts they were far less likely to be extended family or kin than fellow villagers, residents from neighboring communities, even refugees from afar, suggesting a broader logic to charitable activity than one limited to lineage/ bloodlines, or immediate neighbors/tenants.[28]

The attention given lower Yangzi society in current scholarship has led to a distinction between the relief functions of northern and southern elites – in China's "long tradition" of soup kitchens "operating such centers was a function of the local elite *in the south*," Li asserts – that appears to be, at least in the case of Cang County, exaggerated. More, any distinction in the scholarship between the use of soup kitchens in towns and cities as opposed to in villages – in Zhili "normally soup kitchens were used in urban centers rather than the countryside," Li maintains – may well be the result of an overemphasis by scholars on state food policy and its implementation, that is on late imperial *debates* over relief policy in, say, memorials to the throne, at the expense of relief response *in practice* across the social spectrum.[29]

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[28] The story of one resident of Qing County shows that the reception of refugees was practiced also in neighboring counties as far back as the Ming: having relieved "countless poor" with millet donations of 1,000 *shi* during times of "weak harvest" in the Ming Wanli reign (1572-1620), Yao Yong dispensed gruel for three months when neighboring Shandong Province was hit by famine one year and "refugees filled the roads," reportedly saving the lives of 10,000 refugees. *Qing XZ* 1931 8 section A:14b.

[29] Li, *Fighting Famine*, 228. In her discussion of the eighteenth century "High Qing" model, Li does allow for limited elite involvement in soup kitchens in the north: "Elite *assistance* in *maintaining* soup kitchens was necessary because subofficial personnel were insufficient or unreliable," Li writes. "In fact, Yang Jingren wrote about the importance of flattering the rich. The rich households should be cultivated even in normal times so that in hard times they would be easily persuaded to *contribute* grain. Lu Shiji, another statecraft essayist, wrote that in famine prevention pacifying the rich (*anfu*) was second in importance only to promoting agriculture." (223; italics added) Notice here Li's focus on the manipulation of the affluent as pawns for larger state programs, not as social actors with their own interests and human concern (it was the village rich, we must remember, who were the front line of the establishment residing, often for generations, *among the struggling*); secondly, notice the historiographic

Here an analytical tool devised by Philip Kuhn in his study of the Qing imperial bureaucracy through criminal cases of sorcery might be useful.[30] If we draw, as Kuhn does, a distinction between the "state as instrument," that is the apparatus maintaining the power of the Manchu Qing regime, versus the "state as society," the largely Confucian system of symbols, values and relationships maintaining China's lettered establishment at large, we might arrive at a more textured take on north Chinese famine relief, one that includes both a state apparatus concerned with maintaining its rule over a productive society as well as a social establishment seeking to justify its privileges and to replicate itself (both through, in this case, relief of the needy). Indeed, to echo a point made by historian R. Bin Wong, any clear-cut distinction between state and society in the Ming and Qing is an analytical imposition of later historical observers; both the state (i.e. state as instrument) and orthodox society (i.e. state as society) shared a Confucian value system from which relief activity stemmed, a relief legacy over the centuries that, as Wong has argued through study of the Qing civilian granary system, "forces us to take more seriously the paternalistic welfare ideology of Confucianism."[31] In short, when speaking of soup kitchen activity by provincial officials under the Qing or by an affluent household in a stricken rural community, one is speaking of manifestations of a shared relief culture that defies any strict Western or modern distinction between state and non-state actors. This is something to keep in mind as we explore relief in 1920-21, less than a decade after the fall of the Qing.

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reliance on the stated *advice* of statecraft writers largely in place of action itself on the ground, a reliance that serves to buttress the idea that when succor was provided to the starving, policy calculations over social (dis)order and production overwhelmed any other humanitarian motivation.

[30] Philip Kuhn, *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1990), 219.

[31] This point has wider implications for the understanding of the evolution of the state in general: "The dominant logic in many accounts of state formation stresses two aspects of power," Wong writes, control over territory and extraction of wealth. "The Chinese case suggests that preindustrial states could do much more." Will and Wong, *Nourishing the People*, 497-8, 505-6.

Before we return to our famine, though, two notably poor showings in this Republican-era Cang County source should be touched upon: merchants and explicitly Buddhist actors or institutions. Both of these types come together in the form of one man written up in the 1933 Cang gazetteer, Li Sixian, a native of Jiangxi Province who came to Cang in the early 1600s. Li was one of several sojourning salt merchants from Jiangnan and neighboring Shanxi credited with major charitable acts in Cang in a fifty-year stretch of the seventeenth century.[32] Li, though, performed his deeds while heading the office of Cang's Guanglusi temple, distributing coffins and cotton clothes to the poor "every winter" while performing charitable acts ranging from a donation for the repair of fortifications in 1630, sparing some hundred households from bandit attack, to a relief donation of 1,000 gold during a major famine nine years later, "saving countless" of the starving.[33]

Several things might be said about the paucity of Buddhist actors in the Cang gazetteer, which speaks to the limitations of gazetteers in general as sources of local activity. Gazetteers are decidedly secular compositions written largely by scholar-gentry and retired officials for the consumption of their kind, reflecting a value system that saw a "deviant" nature to Daoist and Buddhist practice. If anything, a vibrant heterodox culture and its perceived threat of insurrection and social disorder would be something to hide from the gaze of peers and higher authorities. In his study of local popular religion in Cang County, Thomas David Dubois points out that Zhili

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[32] Wei Qijie, the son of a Shanxi merchant who came to Cang in the early years of the Qing, donated "10,000 gold" (*wan jin*) for the cooking of congee for locals (*linmin*) during drought in 1688, "saving" (*quan huo*) some 16,000 people, while donating cotton clothes in the cold of winter and coffins for the proper burial of the poor Zhang Wenyuan of Datong, Shanxi, came to Cang in the late Ming in the salt trade; donated resources to relief efforts in 1652 and again during massive drought in 1667 donated several hundred *shi* of millet for relief. Zhou Daren, a salt merchant from Zhejiang's Shaoxing Prefecture, who while sojourning in Cang relieved a major famine in 1639 by funding the purchase of rice, "saving countless" – in nineteenth century Hankou salt merchants could earn hundreds of thousands of taels a year, according to William Rowe, while laborers often earned a fraction of a single tael in the same amount of time. *Cang XZ* 1933 8:122ab, 8:450b. William Rowe, *Hankow: Conflict and Community in a Chinese City, 1796-1895* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 51.

[33] *Cang XZ* 1933 8:450a.

gazetteers are "often silent or misleading" on the subject of local religious practice, "a trend that generally grew more intense from the Qing through the Republic." Yet Buddhist temples and monasteries in China have long been sites of medical care and charity for the poor, functions that they provided to some degree as institutions receiving patronage from members of society excluded or sidelined by the Confucian system, namely palace women and other female devotees and powerful and wealthy eunuchs during the Ming unable to produce a patriline of their own. Monastic spaces were also spaces where literati sponsored social activities, carving out spaces for themselves in the crowded and competitive social arena of commercializing periods such as the late Ming.[34] While Cang County, and north China in general, under the Ming and Qing did not experience the flowering of Buddhist institutions to the extent that south China did, it would still be a mistake to take the silence in gazetteer sources for inactivity in this religious realm; as Dubois points out, "almost none" of the extant local histories in the Cang area of Zhili "includes such information as the number of monks present or any clue as to the life within the monastery itself."[35]

In sum, village-level relief in Cang throughout the Qing up through the horrific 1870s debacle, performed by individuals with no explicit official involvement or instruction, suggests the *possibility* at least of layers of activity in the relief culture of north China, a possibility that should be borne in mind as we examine the severe – but ultimately far less lethal – north China famine of 1920-21. The appearance of multiple channels of relief operating simultaneously, at different intensities or degrees across region and period, forces us to discount any reduction of

[34] Timothy Brooks, *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China* (Cambridge, Mass: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University Press, 1993). Naquin, *Peking*, 181, 228-35.
[35] Thomas David Dubois, *The Sacred Village: Social Change and Religious Life in Rural North China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 90-2.

relief activity to particular spheres (official, civil, monastic, lineage or otherwise), scope (local, national, etc.) or origin (indigenous or imported from elsewhere in China or from overseas).

Cang County, 1920-21

In the "major historical events" section of the gazetteer of Nanpi County, Cang's neighbor to the south, the entry for 1920 is a litany of two dozen robbery incidents over the year – complete with time, location and victim – before ending with four characters: "*yin han zhenji*", that is, "due to drought, relief was issued," giving no indication of when, where and by whom.[36] As we explore famine in 1920 through the prism of the experience in Cang, the treatment of the same event by a local history compiler in its neighbor, Nanpi to the south, is worth mentioning for two reasons. The first is to remind ourselves of the fickle nature of the gazetteer as a source. In other words, it is only fortuitous that we possess any amount of detail at all on the Cang County experience in 1920 that is explored in this section. The second point raised by the Nanpi gazetteer is that as we prepare to examine how relief unfolded over the coming winter months in this stretch of the north China plain, it should be pointed out that banditry and violence in general, in addition to the obvious exacerbation of suffering they created, also served to upstage relief activity performed in their vicinity, relief that was achieved in spite of such dangers and instability.

Compared to neighboring Nanpi, fortunately for Cang we have a clearer picture of how relief was mobilized and distributed in 1920, thanks, in large part, to a stone stele erected at the end of 1921 by a man described only as a city gentryman surnamed He. This public marker, transcribed in the final volume of the county's 1933 gazetteer, was entitled "Stele marking the disaster relief and benevolent governance (*dezheng*) of magistrate Wu," and takes its readers

[36] *Nanpi XZ* 1932 13:47a.

through the crisis from the vantage point of what appeared to be a capable magistrate named Wu Yong, also known as Wu Suiru.[37]

Having been devastated by the 1917 floods that had struck much of Zhili, Cang residents were already in the Fall of 1920 selling off livestock, digging up roots for food to quell hunger, and fleeing daily by the thousands when, starting in October, the Ministry of Communications made passage on the railroad free for refugees. The manager of the Cang County railhead was sending refugees in batches up to Tianjin and onward to Manchuria, but reportedly only for ten days, after which passage was temporarily halted and people began to "drift from place to place." It was then that magistrate Wu issued a desperate appeal to the state and outside relief agencies, and then that county merchant-gentry formed a relief society to coordinate the reception of incoming relief. A commemoration stone erected in August 1921 called a "Stele commissioned by the Cang County Disaster Relief Society to express thanks for relief by outside charities" details what the county received in the way of *outside* relief over the course of the crisis.[38] Using these two stone markers along with scattered reports in the press that year we can construct a reasonably detailed picture of the mechanics of relief in this one district over the course of the crisis, at least at the county level.

Both these 1921 county steles and published correspondence in relief society literature in Beijing depict Magistrate Wu as the point man and facilitator of relief throughout the crisis. As early as July 1920, Wu had released 3,000 *shi*, or 360,000 *jin*, of grain from the county granary to help stabilize food prices, one of the first steps in traditional Chinese responses to rising food prices before the onset of full-fledged famine, as we have seen.[39] When a feeble autumn harvest became evident in early November 1920, the county followed this up by dispatching agents

[37] *Cang XZ* 1933 13:59a-60a.
[38] *Cang XZ* 1933 13:59b.
[39] *Da gongbao*, 21 July 1920.

south to three locations in the lower Yangzi region to bring in some 2,800 tons, or 4,704,000 *jin*, of sorghum and millet up the rail line for discount sale to the public in a bid to reign in food prices – enough to feed the entire county population of 400,000 for over three weeks.[40] By the fall, many in Cang were earning the coppers required to purchase the subsidized grain of the *pingtiao* centers by turning to traditional coping strategies when agriculture had failed. As the 1933 gazetteer recounts, "people survived [in 1920] on earth salt production and making mats of woven bamboo and leaves," resorting to an age-old fallback used elsewhere in the region in 1920.

With the food crisis having developed into full-scale famine in the fall, though, the first relief money to enter Cang from outside was a meager $2,000 in "emergency relief" credited to Zhili governor Cao Rui, which was reportedly intended to "jump-start" donations from the public, as well as a certain amount of gold from Cao as seed money so that local gentry would form a county relief society.[41] The resulting society then "elected" magistrate Wu as its chief, and chose as assistant managers both a Catholic priest (presumably a Frenchman from the Order of Lazarists, which operated in the county) and a representative of the Buddhist Foundling Relief Society of Shanghai, a group already active in the area, choices presumably designed to tap into the deep pockets of the missionary and Shanghai communities. (The foundling society, or *Fojiao jiaoying hui*, was organized in the fall of 1920 by an older Buddhist relief group based in Shanghai, the Buddhist Compassion Society, or *Fojiao cibei hui*, which had been formed in 1917 in response to the devastating floods hitting Zhili that year. It appears that the foundling society concentrated its efforts in 1920-21 in Cang County, and in Lingqing zhou in the extreme

[40] *Da gongbao*, 9 Nov. 1920.
[41] In a later report in *Jiuzai zhoukan*, the governor's initial $2,000 was described as enough to give four coppers to each of the 70,000 tallied victims at that moment – that is, barely enough for a *jin* of grain at *pingtiao* offices – which, as a later reported lamented using a stock phrase used to describe inadequate state measures, was "like dousing a cup of water on a burning wagon of firewood." *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 19 Dec. 1920.

northwest of Shandong, where 190,000 people were reportedly affected by the famine, or 70 percent of the population.[42])

Magistrate Wu kept in regular contact with various relief organizations in the big cities, including the North China Relief Society led by statesman Liang Shiyi and its publication *Jiuzai zhoukan* (*Famine Relief Weekly*). Over the course of five months Liang's society sent 330 sacks (*bao*), or 52,800 *jin*, of flour, 700 items of clothing, and winter relief of $21,000 for 89 villages, and an additional $12,000 of relief in the spring, all of which was used to purchase grain for distribution by the gentry-formed Cang County Disaster Relief Society led by Wu.[43] One December report in *Jiuzai zhoukan* described how a relief agent from Liang's society met with magistrate Wu and local gentry at the education office – which, as we have seen, was a common focus of gentry activity in the late Qing and early Republic – to discuss the distribution of flour and clothing using the registration of the poor made by the county. Village heads came to the county seat to secure relief materials and returned to their respective villages, after which county relief agents "personally" followed up to see that proper distribution was given in each village.[44] Another report, this one from June 1921, described how the society's first $6,000 distribution of spring relief was used to buy 150,371 *jin* of grain for distribution to impoverished (*jipin*) families. Rations were 13 *jin* to adults and 6 *jin* to children handed out at two distribution points: the county Guandi temple and the education bureau. Cart transport expenses were covered by local money generated by "capable" (*youli*) families in the villages for a reported total of $5,000.[45] In addition to acting as relief distributor for the above North China Relief Society, the Cang society also distributed nearly 160,000 *jin* of grain and 1,450 items of clothing on behalf of a north

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[42] *Shibao*, 9 Nov. 1920. *Shibao*, 11 Dec. 1920. Yu, *Fojiao renwu*, 927. Fuller and Liang, ed., "Statement of Aims," 11.
[43] *Cang XZ* 1933 13:60a.
[44] *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 19 Dec. 1920.
[45] *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 19 June 1921. *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 21 Aug. 1921.

China relief society formed by Shanghai's Guangrentang benevolence hall; $11,480 and 50,000 *jin* of grain from a Chinese group called the Zhili Charity Relief Society, or *Zhili yizhen hui*; $200 expressly for "refugees" (*liumin*) from the Japanese minister to China; and 300 sets of clothing from a group of Japanese students.

The Buddhist Foundling Relief Society of Shanghai sent in over $20,000 in relief funds over eight months, which by March included support of 8,000 people in 28 villages as well as the purchase of 600,000 *jin* of relief grain and the maintenance of 1,000 children until the following year's wheat harvest using cash payments of $2 a month to their families. Agents for the Buddhist society also distributed $2,574 in relief money on behalf of a Shanghai group roughly called the Life Assistance Society of China, or *Zhongguo jisheng hui*.

Using resident Catholic officials as agents, Tianjin's international relief society distributed an unspecified amount of rice, sorghum and peanuts "continuously" through the winter, spring and summer, including 40 tons of dried sweet potatoes in the spring, while other relief groups sent in their own agents to supervise distribution, including the Charity Relief Society of China, or *Zhongguo yizhen hui*, contributing 1,047 items of clothing and 45,075 *jin* of sweet potato biscuits; a Beijing charity called the *Wushanshe*, or Society for Awakening Goodness, with 700 sacks (*bao*), or 112,000 *jin*, of millet and sorghum; the Drought Relief Society of Fengtian Province (today's Liaoning in Manchuria), or *Fengtian jiuji hanzai xiehui*, with 240,000 *jin* of grain and $2,000 for transportation costs; and Zhili Province's Shunzhi Disaster Relief Society, or *Shunzhi hanzai jiuji hui*, which sent in 10,500 *jin* of wheat seed in the fall. Finally, Beijing's Government Relief Bureau sent in 250,000 *jin* of corn, millet and sorghum, along with 500 sets of clothing: a poor showing compared to state relief in other Zhili counties

that year, as we will see, and one possibly explained by the fact that Cang had been initially categorized as a low state priority compared to its harder-hit neighbors.[46]

Cang no doubt benefited from its position on the rail line, and received a larger share of its aid from Shanghai (to which it was connected by rail to the south) than other Zhili counties examined later in this chapter. What should be stressed regarding the Cang County experience in 1920-21 is both the diversity of the relief actors sending in materials and the absence of more familiar relief institutions: the role of the Chinese Red Cross in 1920 was largely informational, producing thorough reports from the field but only a nationwide relief total of $85,000 and 8,000 items of clothing while a sub-branch of the Red Cross did not form in Cang County itself until 1927. Curiously, neither does the Tianjin Red Swastika Society appear in Cang's relief effort for 1920, although it had been active in Cang in the devastating floods of the 1910s after which "charitable local gentry" had, according to the gazetteer, established a Red Swastika Society sub-branch.[47]

Grain shipments were at times held up by the outbreak of disease: an outbreak near the important nearby rail head of Sangyuan prompted ticket sales and transport along a 500 *li* stretch of the Tianjin-Jinan to be cut off for a period in March. Disease, though, does not appear to have held up relief movement for long in 1920. Nor did security concerns: in November 1920, army division commander Long Jiguang arrived in person in Cang, according to the gazetteer, to hand out money to his soldiers for their disbandment after they had molested the region's residents for months.[48] Similarly, with relief agencies throughout the fall requesting military escorts for their shipments along the canal, which was feared unsafe due to bandit activity, "escorts were

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[46] *Cang XZ* 1933 13:60a. *Da gongbao*, 6 Dec. 1920. *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 9 Dec. 1920. *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 27 March 1921.
[47] Zhang Jianqiu, *Zhongguo hongshizi hui chuqi fazhan zhi yanjiu* (*A Study of the Development of the Chinese Red Cross*) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 101. *Cang XZ* 1933 8:187b, 16:40b.
[48] *Cang XZ* 1933 16:38b.

promptly dispatched" by the Zhili governor, Cao Rui, according to press reports. Elsewhere in Zhili, witnesses to the famine described "long caravans of grain-carrying carts escorted by government troops" passing by "for days on end." The provincial government was evidently taking the security of relief resources seriously.[49]

According to the stone stele erected at the end of 1921, "all matters" in the 1920 famine passed before the review of magistrate Wu Yong, who had instructed that affairs be handled in a "public-spirited and just manner," checking on the famine-stricken to "make sure that none were lost to hunger or to the cold" while "sparing them the hardship of appealing for help" by appealing himself to the state and outside agencies. In the end, Wu was rewarded by the president of the Republic, who reportedly composed a poem "commending him for serving as the father and mother of the people." "Although last year will be remembered as a cruel year for the people," the stele commemorating Wu's service concluded, "from start to finish" the magistrate "shone throughout," evidently taking seriously a Confucian paternalistic role vis-à-vis the residents of his jurisdiction. Exaggeration is of course possible in this commemorative description of Wu, but his paternalistic approach to governance echoed other reports on local Chinese officials that fall.[50] The stele was also made for public consumption and scrutiny.

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[49] *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 27 March 1921. *Da gongbao*, 9 Nov. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 2 Dec. 1920. Robert Tharp, *They Called Us White Chinese: the Story of a Lifetime of Service to God and Mankind* (Charlotte, NC: Delmar Printing & Publishing Co, 1994), 108.

[50] Other Chinese were served in 1920 by officials in the mold of "Cheo Ting-yuen," a magistrate in Gansu Province, struck by a devastating earthquake that December (as if five-province famine to the east were not enough): "One is filled with admiration for the magistrate here," reads a report by a Dr. Parry circulated in early 1921 within the American Legation in China. "When the earthquake came on he quickly ordered men to rush out and call the people from their homes… When the quake was over he went out to set the people to work at once and rescue the living who were prisoned in the debris. The next day when the people wanted shelter he sent out every one of the 70 or 80 tents in the Yamen [county hall], he himself sleeping on the ground with next to no cover over him. He has since given out a month's grain to those without food, from the granaries which he had built against the time of famine. He clothed the poor from the pawn shops. He has ordered and supervised the burial of the dead, including animals for prevention of diseases. For three days, he in addition to all the above work, fasted and wept for the people. He was evidently indispensable to the city and God spared his life. Now he says, 'I understand why God ['Shang-Ti'] spared me. The people would have been completely disorganized if I had been killed.' He is really living for the people." Report excerpted in Huston to Colby, letter, 4 Feb. 1921, SDF 893.48g. This same report also appears in

"Clichés, after all, are crystallizations of a society's preoccupations," Joanna Handlin Smith has written on charity during the late Ming. "Gross misrepresentation" in local accounts of beneficent rule would have ruined any account "in the eyes of (its) readers." Regardless of the ulterior motives behind acts of charity, they could meet, as Smith explains, "cultural norms or expectations mandating aid to the indigent during bad harvests."[51]

While this dominant role of the Cang magistrate in 1920 fits well into the description that we have seen argued about northern relief culture by Lillian Li, in which state actors took the leading role, we will have to wait until we move further west into the famine field of 1920 to locate evidence of relief at the household level. Several points might be made though about this glaring omission of contributions and private activity by local actors from the 1920 Cang experience related above. Steles were in both of the above cases composed for the commemoration of *outside* actors relieving Cang – a status that includes Magistrate Wu Yong, who was a native of Anhui Province. Two other inscriptions in the Cang gazetteer of 1933 focus on relief from sojourning outsiders and higher officials.[52]

Mrs. Howard Taylor, *The Call of China's Great Northwest: Kansu and Beyond* (London: China Inland Mission, 1923), 54, and Miss S. J. Garland, "Earthquake in Northwest China: Terrible Loss of Life and Suffering," *Celestial Empire*, 5 Feb. 1921.

[51] Smith, *Art of Doing Good*, 65, 68.

[52] The content of two inscriptions printed in the Cang County gazetteer of 1933 do in fact square with this shared monopoly of state and southern relief in north China. One of the inscriptions, composed in April 1919, commemorates the 1896 establishment of a benevolence hall, simply named the Cishan Tang, or Charity Hall, in the village of Hancun by a merchant sojourning in the North from his native Zhejiang Province. Arriving in Hancun on business in 1891, the man, Zhou Jiarui, was "sick at heart" to find the village suffering from a "major famine," and after repeatedly falling ill himself from various ailments (and marrying a local woman surnamed Li who reportedly cut flesh from her own thigh as a prayer offering for his recovery), raised funds for the purchase of 32 *mu* of land and, calling the newfound institution the Charity Hall, devoted the land's harvested grain as aid to the local poor, after which the hall expanded in its charitable operations over the years. This inscription is followed by another commemorating a high official for the successful relief of Cang during a regional drought famine in 1908. Having put off rent and tax collection, and in the course of "distributing an abundance of relief to the starving and saving countless of the afflicted" (*pei en shi jimin, quanhuo zhe wusuan*), the Qing court was said to have neglected Cang in its operations, despite the reported severity of its plight. Taking notice, Liu Gongruo, a minister from the Court of Judicial Review (*da li yuan*), teamed up with members of the Hanlin Academy and other officials to memorialize the throne on behalf of Cang, ultimately bringing 3,000 *liang* in grain-price leveling (*pingtiao*) funds, winter relief from the state relief bureau and the Cang environs "back to life" (*zai sheng*). It appears as though, in the case of this Cang

We also might be reminded that gazetteer biographies normally served as obituaries, appearing after the death of their subject. It makes sense then that if we turn to a grave inscription printed in the back of the gazetteer for neighboring Qing, a county between Cang and the port city of Tianjin, we see evidence of a major household relief contribution in 1920. The inscription was composed by a son for his mother after her death in 1927. Qian Chongkai, a military official, explains that his mother, surnamed Hou and a native of Nanpi County on Cang's southern edge, had instructed her son to "balance ambition with frugality, living as if in times of poverty and giving away whatever surplus the family had in the form of clothes, gruel and coffin handouts." "Accordingly," the inscription follows, "in the great famine year of 1920, with the granary stocks insufficient for relief, [the family] purchased several thousand *shi* of grain for the stricken," or several hundred thousand kilos, an amount surpassing the entire grain contribution cited above to neighboring Cang County from Beijing's Government Relief Bureau.[53]

Another story from this charitable woman's native county, Nanpi, relates that when in 1920 many in the countryside were struggling to "carry on," one Yang Chunting was quoted as saying "All my neighbors are starving, how can I bear having a full stomach?" before "exhausting" his own millet stores for their aid. His brief biography, which says little else about the man, ends with the fact that when, after a "bumper harvest" the following year, those he had helped came to repay him for his generosity, he refused to accept anything in return, a debt amnesty that we will see practiced in other villages in the same region around 1920.[54] For further

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record, stelae inscriptions were reserved for the generosity and diligence of outsiders bringing in relief to the county. See *wenbian*, first half, 25ab, 26a of *Cang XZ* 1933.

[53] *Qing XZ* 1931 14:27b.

[54] *Nanpi XZ* 1932 9:78a.

evidence of relief emanating from households in the rural famine zone of 1920-21, however, we will move to the other end of the Zhili famine zone – to the mountains of Shanxi Province.

Pingding County, Shanxi

Pingding was described in 1920 as a "land-poor and rock-heavy" county in the mountains west of the north China plain just over the border in Shanxi. With the largest population in the province, the county had a meager two *mu* of productive land per resident in 1920. Even in years of good harvest Pingding brought in several hundred thousand *shi* of grain from Zhili, Henan and Shandong, imports largely financed by the county's considerable mineral deposits and by the remittances of some 80,000 of its native sons working menial jobs or plying trades in those same provinces to the east.

By the fall of 1920, though, eight rainless months had followed thin rainfall and a weak harvest in 1919, as well as a locust infestation that had consumed half the fall harvest the year before. Amid the food crisis and global post-WWI economic slump, some 50,000 Pingding natives had lost jobs or faltering trades in the cities or on the stricken plains out east and, in place of their remitted earnings that helped pay for the tens of millions of *jin* of grain normally brought into the county, tens of thousands of hungry bodies were returning home in 1920. At the same time, the county coal industry was shutting down since rising grain prices made it more expensive to employ miners, who in normal years numbered upwards of 70,000 in the county. More, from Jingxing, Zaohuang, and Yuanshi counties in neighboring Zhili, an "unceasing stream" of refugees numbering hundreds a day had filled the county roads, some staying put, others moving on to food sources to the north and west. In all, this influx boosted the number of people in the county in 1920 by 100,000 to some 300,000, many of whom had little land and

normally depended on light industry for a living. By March of 1921, with the old and weak reportedly perishing "one after another" in the winter snowfall, field reports estimated that a third of the county could not carry on to the spring without assistance.[55]

The Village

In October of 1920, the major Beijing daily *Shuntian shibao* ran an open letter from a Pingding resident to his countrymen. Feng Sizhi had been "born and raised" along with his brothers in the Pingding village of Nan'aocun, the writer explained. In order to bear witness to the unfolding famine, Feng had returned home from the provincial capital, where he headed the Taiyuan Education Society (*jiaoyu hui*), a common occupation, as we have seen, of gentry left out of formal positions of local governance in the period. Feng determined that relying on officials there was not enough: "with all their talk of relief plans," he explained, "fundraising remained a major problem." Two plans presented themselves to Feng, the first of which was what he called the exceptional method (*tebie banfa*) of investigating the hardest hit areas and dispensing congee and clothes and seeking financing from officials when funds fell short; the second was what he called the ordinary method (*putong banfa*) in which "each village manages its own relief affairs (*ge cun banli ge cun de zhenji shiyi*)."[56]

"Following their mother's commands (*feng wo muqin de ciming*)," he noted to his readers, Feng and his brothers lay the groundwork for the "ordinary method" of famine response by first making a headcount of their village stricken. Of the village's 300 households, they determined that 107 households qualified as "poor," for which Feng specified their criteria: only those widowed or alone and without support were included, a count that excluded homes with able-

[55] *Da gongbao*, 24 Dec. 1920. *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 6 March 1921.
[56] *Shuntian shibao*, 9 Oct. 1920. The letter also appeared in *Laifu bao*, 10 Oct. 1920.

bodied men (*zhuang ding*) and addicts (*you shihao de*), presumably of opium.[57] The brothers then drew up a plan in which each member of these poor households would be given a daily ration of two – possibly three, the source is barely legible – *he* of millet porridge – that is, 900 or 1,350 calories[58] a day until the first of May, as well as a set of winter clothes, putting total estimated expenses for the seven month program in the village at $1,000. (The program was designed, in Feng's words, to provide "enough to prevent death from hunger," which lends credibility to the latter ration of 1,350 calories, which, curiously, would almost have exactly matched the typical Qing ration cited by both Lillian Li and Pierre-Étienne Will.)[59] Feng went on to explain that he and his brothers were "not monied people" and that the family earnings of the previous few years had mostly gone to home maintenance. Although their "pockets were now empty," the increased value of their home investment meant they had more collateral to borrow (although it is unclear from whom) and fund their share of any relief project. "After consultation with their mother," Feng again noted, the men decided to take charge of their village's relief.

Through this one source we cannot, unfortunately, get further into Feng's reasoning or his relation to the mother he repeatedly mentions, but the diary of Liu Dapeng, a fellow member of the rural Shanxi gentry briefly mentioned at the start of this chapter, may serve by proxy as a window into the upbringing of relief actors in the area. As Liu Dapeng faithfully memorialized in his diary, his father – the owner of a shop selling coffins and furniture and other wood products

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[57] In her study of early benevolent societies in the lower Yangzi 300 years before our famine, Joanna Handlin Smith identifies similar guidelines excluding the able-bodied in favor of the "sick and crippled" as well as preferences for "those who are filial, friendly, honest, and chaste, or who are living alone with no one to rely on." Smith, *Art of Doing Good*, 55, 88.

[58] Two and three *he* of millet, being 1/5th and 3/10^{ths} of a *sheng* (pint), respectively, contained roughly 900 and 1,350 calories based on the following conversions: a *sheng* of grain corresponded to approximately two *jin*, each of which (whether corn, kaoliang or millet) contained an average of 2,250 calories, according to the American Red Cross in 1921. Baker, ed., "Report," 18, 222.

[59] Li records an "adult famine ration standard of .005 *shi* of husked grain per person per day" for the Qing period, which, at 120 *jin* per *shi* and 2,250 calories per *jin*, calculates to 1,350 calories per ration. Pierre-Étienne Will similarly states that under the Qing "the typical ration of one-half *sheng* per day would represent… 420 grams of bleached rice, just barely a survival ration, for at about 3,300 kilocalories per kilogram, 420 grams provides less than 1,400 kilocalories." Li, *Fighting Famine*, 159. Will, *Bureaucracy and Famine*, 132.

in Taigu County, which would be heavily affected by the 1920 famine – had stressed to his son "to be upright and of good character, to be charitable to the poor, to be on his guard against greed…" in the words of Henrietta Harrison. Similarly, penning a poem for his mother's birthday, which he "offered silently to the gods with incense at dawn," Liu "praise[d] his mother's generosity to the poor" and, "overwhelmed by the sense of his own sins," he ended his poem by "beseeching the gods to take years from his life and add them to hers." Elsewhere in his diary, Liu recorded a dream in which his father spent "several thousand copper coins" to buy medicine for "someone in need," adding that "this was characteristic of my father. When my father and mother were alive, they put their energy into doing good, only regretting that they did not have enough time… my feelings of great admiration [for them] press me on," which had presumably been a factor driving Liu when he assisted in the relief of stricken villagers through the drought of 1901. "In this dream we see the transformation of Liu's filial piety into a general justification for doing good," Harrison explains. "As he says elsewhere, his parents were respected because they were good and charitable, so filial piety demands that he, too, should be good and charitable…"[60] As we will see, Liu was not the only man in Shanxi or Zhili to invoke his parents – and his mother in particular – when performing acts of famine relief in early twentieth century north China: social values transmitted between generations were evidently very present in the minds of relief initiators, donors, and administrators in the famine field. (More, Harrison's study offers a glimpse into what acts of local famine relief meant to their recipients in rural Shanxi, and how this translated into very real social rewards for the benefactor. "A member of one of the county's oldest and wealthiest families" was later "arrested as a counter revolutionary by the Communists," Harrison explains, after which "hundreds of people from his village went to

[60] Harrison, *Man Awakened*, 24, 65, 75.

rescue him because he had distributed food to the people in his village during the Japanese occupation."[61])

In Pingding, in October of 1920, the Feng brothers convened a meeting with representatives of other villages where it was estimated that if Feng's proposal were pursued, larger villages would stand to spend $1,000, small villages several hundred dollars each, and that any program would hinge on the condition that the village poor benefiting from the program would not go begging in other villages and that extra resources could not be generated to assist refugees from outside the county. (Feng left unsaid how the able-bodied but jobless men from the coal industry or returning from work in other provinces were to be assisted, if at all.) Money would be either pooled by all able residents of a village or by one or several villagers of greater means, and, with "the proposal supported by all present," it was decided that "each village" would begin operation in the month of October. Finally, in places where a village could not generate the necessary resources, they would appeal for assistance from the state. Ending on the personal note that he would himself have to take on debt to go ahead with the village program, Feng appealed to wealthy gentry of the village and the county at large to "realize this plan in all villages and counties" of Shanxi, ending with the words, "How can we hinder a plan that is so much within reach?"

Follow-up reports are, unfortunately, not readily available on whether, or to what extent, such village programs were carried through in the county. Instead, local publications offer only hints of their operation, such as the profile of one Pingding resident, Liu Yinou of the village of Donggoucun, who responded to the growing number of the famished begging in the streets of his village in October 1920 by donating 15 *shi*, or 1,800 *jin*, of rice, in the form of congee dispensed to the village poor. Later in the month, when many of the village's ironworkers had closed their

[61] *Ibid*., 99.

operations in despair due to the food crisis, Liu urged them to keep working by opening up his own iron works operation, after which "one after another" the village workers followed his example and resumed their trade to the point where "many of the village jobless" were by the end of October "supporting themselves and their families."[62] (Liu's gesture aside, the American Red Cross, which operated in Pingding in 1920-21, reported a mass-purchase of foundry products by local businessmen that year that saved the lives of 50,000 craftsmen and their families, in its estimation, which was likely the main reason that Liu's fellow villagers got back to work.)[63]

Elsewhere in the province, though, one does find evidence of active village-level relief societies along the lines described by letter-writer Feng Sizhi. For example, in an unusually upbeat November article in the official news weekly published in Taiyuan, *Laifu bao*, which begins with the morale-boosting if dubious determination that "self-relief by individual villages" was "easy to accomplish," we learn that a farmer named Zhang Mingxing in the village of Xinhecun in Wutai County, which borders Zhili just to the north of Pingding, had "exhausted" his own grain reserves with a donation of 30 *shi*, or some 3,600 *jin*, of millet to his village's Poor Relief Society (*jiupin hui*), with a promise to devote to the poor of his village any surplus from the upcoming millet harvest that was beyond the needs of his family. (The weekly later ran an article on village chief Wang Peiyu of Hongbiaocun, also in Wutai, who responded to the famished in his village with a donation of 3,000 *jin* of peaches from a family orchard in order to "fill the stomachs" of the village poor. Two *jin* of boiled peaches a day were needed to sustain

[62] The story does not say who bought these products, but the American Red Cross reported a mass purchase of foundry products by local businessmen in 1920-21 Pingding to keep craftsmen afloat, as we will see below. It might also be mentioned that in the early 1900s, this evidently public-spirited man had reportedly donated hundreds of gold dollars for the establishment of a village school, after which he covered the operating expenses of a half-day school for the working poor. *Laifu bao*, 31 Oct. 1920.
[63] Baker, ed., "Report," 93-96.

someone, the article explained, and while "they did not compare to the five grains, they were rich in nutrients" and lowered the number of those turning to famine foods like tree bark and rice husks.)[64]

For any detail on the actual mechanics of relief in Shanxi at the village level, though, we must turn to the "village self-relief measure" (*cun zi jiuji banfa*) drawn up and submitted to the provincial government by Anyingcun in Shanyin County, which lay on a well-worn route north to the fertile region of Datong along the Great Wall in Shanxi's borderlands with Inner Mongolia. There village chief Guo Songshan reported that, amid severe drought and a spike in prices, a day's worth of handicraft work that had previously been enough to feed an entire family was now insufficient to sustain a lone worker. Shanyin County as a whole had been the recipient of 400 *shi*, or 48,000 *jin*, of emergency relief grain from the province in November, but it is unclear if any of this had reached Anyingcun village itself, where the village leadership had by early November convened with the heads of village households to discuss and draft a relief plan.[65]

Using the same five-level categorization of residents employed by the Shanxi provincial government when determining its relief services,[66] village heads in Anyingcun decided that their relief program would benefit families in the poorer 4th and 5th economic tiers of the village – the 4th tier defined as those with no agricultural work this year due to the drought and only handicrafts to rely on, the 5th being the outright destitute. In the presence of the family head, the village leadership would take inventory of the grain reserves of every household in the village. Homes reaping over 20 *shi* of grain in the present autumn harvest would be "levied a

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[64] *Laifu bao*, 7 Nov. 1920. *Laifu bao*, 26 Dec. 1920.
[65] *Laifu bao*, 7 Nov. 1920. Provincial grain shipment cited in *Laifu bao*, 28 Nov. 1920.
[66] These categories were *xiaokang* (fairly well-off), *zhongchang* (middling), *shaopin* (slightly poor), *cipin* (secondary poor), and *jipin* (destitute). Joanna Handlin Smith identifies a similar system of classifying poorer social strata receiving aid from food-relief programs in the lower Yangxi region of the 1600s as does Lillian Li for eighteenth-century Zhili. *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 20 Feb. 1920. Smith, *Art of Doing Good*, 88. Li, *Fighting Famine*, 224.

contribution" of three *sheng* (liters) per *shi* with all types of grains accepted equally with no prejudice; homes reaping less than 20 *shi* that fall would be levied nothing; and homes reaping over 20 *shi* but with an exceptional number of mouths to feed would be levied less in proportion to the number of people and livestock in the household.

"This famine year is an opportunity for wealthy families to do good for the community," read the drafted plan. "As for stingy and mean people who deliberately undercount their stocks, relief managers will enter, without contest, whatever amount householders wish to provide." But any such people were told to "hold their actions up to their conscience." As for "charitable families" choosing to contribute grain above the three *sheng* quota, the market price of their donations would be recorded and their deed submitted to the county for due recognition, which traditionally often included an honorary plaque or banner from the state to hang at the family gate.

Relief would be handed out to families of the 4th and 5th tiers in the following fashion: every ten days women, the widowed, orphans and those generally alone without support and less than 16 years of age or over 60 would each receive a daily grain ration ("*mei ren mei ri*") of one *sheng* (or liter based on the "*xin dou*" measurement) until the lunar end of April 1921 – roughly two *jin* of grain or 4,000 calories, a much higher ration than the one planned by Feng Sizhi in his village in Pingding. The village head would write a donation order, stamp and seal it, and the recipient would present it to an assigned donor household for his or her grain ration. The submitted plan ended with a warning that no disputes, haggling or disturbances would be tolerated.

Lying on a main north-south route through the province, Anyingcun was also beset by refugees from neighboring provinces passing north to the fertile expanse beyond the Great Wall.

In light of village fears that this traffic would "breed disturbances," the relief plan also allowed for the recruitment of thirty "able-bodied men" from 4th tier village families to serve on village patrols (*cun jing*) – a move doubtless designed to occupy idle, down-and-out young males, as well. Split into three teams, each team would serve one 10-day shift per month, basing itself in the village office. Oil, candles, firewood and the same daily ration above of a liter, or two *jin*, of grain per person would be provided by the village. By day the men would "tend to road maintenance," by night they would take turns patrolling the area until their disbandment at the end of the lunar month of February 1921.

Province & county

In early October 1920, Shanxi governor Yan Xishan arrived in Pingding and neighboring hard-hit Meng County by train, meeting with village heads and residents in the countryside before convening with members of official, gentry, education and merchant circles at the Pingding city Confucian temple. A few weeks earlier, in late August, Yan's government had instructed Pingding magistrate Liu Yagong to establish grain-price leveling, or *pingtiao*, operations, after which the newly-appointed magistrate raised $35,000 in loans from local merchant-gentry circles for the operation of *pingtiao* centers at five locations across the county – an operation that included putting 3,000 *shi*, or 360,000 *jin*, of discounted grain onto the market in early November.[67] The county had also begun ranking households for a plan in which 4th and 5th tier families would be provisioned with "suitable funds and assistance" from "merchant-gentry organized sub-county disaster relief societies (*ben xian ge shen shang zucheng zhi hanzai*

[67] *Laifu bao*, 29 Aug. 1920. *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 14 Nov. 1920. *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 6 March 1921.

jiuji fenhui)".[68] This was presumably a reference to the village programs undertaken by the Feng household and others above.

But with increasing numbers of landowners, too, without the cash this year needed to take advantage of discount grain sales, Governor Yan was reportedly in the county to propose the establishment of a charity pawn bureau (*dichan ju*) that would make micro-loans "whereby moderately poor families" – that is 3rd tier families possessing land and dependable livelihoods but for whom lenders this year had "closed their doors" – "could weather the crisis" without the humiliation of having to "hold up a silver bowl and beg for food." At the temple, the governor then made a "personal" donation of $1,000, according to an official account of the October meeting, after which pledges of money from "one local gentryman after another" led to the establishment, "before the day was out," of a county charity pawn office in a scene of "unusual joy."[69] The governor's plan appeared to take hold elsewhere in the province, as well: later in December, a report from a county in the extreme south of Shanxi – Yuanqu on the banks of the Yellow River – related that the county merchant association, *shanghui*, had followed provincial orders to open one such *dichan ju* in the city center to "assist those with property (*chanye*) but no money" around the same time that "warm-hearted and public-spirited gentry (*rexin gongyi zhi shenshi*)" in the county had formed a drought relief society, or *Yuanquxian hanzai jiuji hui*, to relieve the extreme poor of each village.[70]

Within a few weeks the province published detailed stipulations on how a program dubbed the Pingding Land-Security Loan Bureau, or *zhidi ju*, would operate. (It is unclear if, in

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[68] *Laifu bao*, 7 Nov. 1920.
[69] *Laifu bao*, 17 Oct. 1920.
[70] With 12,164 people in 66 afflicted villages in the county, village heads (*cunzhang*) in Yuanqu were ordered (*chi*), presumably by the county, to both employ destitute able-bodied men (*jipin zhuangding*) by forming local militia (*baowei tuan*) and temporarily divert (*zannuo*) what was termed a social fund (*shekuan*) in order to relieve (*jiuji*) the old, frail, mothers and the young, all of destitute (*jinpin*) status. Any villages unable to effect its own relief measures could apply to the county for access to a relief fund raised from donations by the wealthy households of each district (*ge qu chouji fuhu juankuan*). *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 19 Dec. 1920.

the case of Pingding, this office was meant to replace the above charity pawn bureau, whose name had suggested the pawning of property, *chanye*, as opposed to land.) This new Land Security Loan Office would use land, and land alone, as security for relief loans limited to families categorized in the same 3rd tier benefited above. By early November a total of $65,000 had been raised by the state and area businesses for loaning out through the program to these 3rd tier households – $10,000 from the province; $10,000 from the Baojin Company; $5,000 from Pingding's Taoye Company; and $40,000 from a collection of merchants from Pingding city and the county market town of Yangquanzhan. Families were limited to mortgaging no more land than was necessary to cover loans sufficient to feed all family members for the half year up to the spring harvest, which amounted to a loan of $4 for each adult and $2 for children (for an adult, $4 purchased roughly 180 days' worth of discounted grain at *pingtiao* centers). Repayments made within six months would incur an interest rate of 1% a month, or 12% per annum, which rose to a maximum of 1.6% a month, or 19.2% per annum, if debts were not cleared until months 18 to 24 of the loan period.[71]

Considering Pingding's destitute population, there was a need for free relief, of course, from the start. Disaster relief agencies brought in large volumes of grain and money to the county in 1920-21 for both free and work relief regimes, compensating to some degree for the collapse of Pingding's "normal" economic system in which mining profits and remittances had

[71] *Laifu bao*, 7 Nov. 1920. One-fifth of interest payments would go to program administrators, the rest to shareholders. These were in fact heavily discounted loans, especially in the interior where borrowing was considerably more expensive than in coastal/urban areas. An October 1920 report in a Beijing daily referenced the "long-established custom" of Tianjin pawnshops to charge a monthly interest of 2.5% (or 30% per annum) before cutting rates to 1.5% (or 18% per annum) as a "charitable gesture to the poor" in the weeks before the New Year when debts were traditionally cleared in Chinese society. In light of the famine, the report continued, Tianjin shops in 1920 were making their annual holiday interest reduction in mid-October, a month earlier than usual. It might be worth mentioning that Mary Backus Rankin has written of the existence of gentry-founded low-interest charity pawnshops in numerous cities in the lower Yangzi in the 1880s. Pierre-Étienne Will cites a "legal" mortgage interest rate cap of three percent per month in the mid-Qing, although this was undoubtedly exceeded in practice. *Shihua*, 10 Nov. 1920. T. S. Whelan, *The Pawnshop in China* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1979). Rankin, *Elite* Activism, 126. Will, *Bureaucracy and Famine*, 54.

bankrolled the mass import of foodstuffs. So did the central and provincial state bring in food, but to an apparently lesser extent, although data is patchy for all efforts. While it concentrated its extensive 1920-21 relief operations in coastal Shandong Province, the American Red Cross did operate that year in Pingding County. Thanks to the group's thorough accounting, we do have a good picture of its Pingding operations, which expended $600,000 on an 80-mile long road construction project in the county, employing 25,000 road workers plus four dependents each for a total of 125,000 relieved.[72]

Interestingly, the American Red Cross remarked in its end-of-year report that, instead of coming to the aid of the "great middle class of thrifty farmers" who were forced, according to the report, to sell their homes because of the crisis – precisely the 3rd tier households targeted by the said program above – "all of the native organizations for relief" in Pingding "confined their aid to the aged, widows, orphans, and those without saleable property," feeding "the people who are always more or less a burden to society and often those who were really not worthy of help." While this important issue of entitlement will be dealt with in a later chapter, two points might be made here: this determination by Red Cross writers ignores evidence of relief programs designed to assist specifically those "3rd tier" families at risk of selling off property to survive the year; and secondly, this apparent predilection for the weak by certain Pingding relief groups to which the report refers is in contrast to the larger aims of native famine relief programs in north China as depicted by Lillian Li in her concentration on the state. Feeding the most vulnerable in times of crisis at the expense of "thrifty" and "worthy" farmers would be no step toward the restoration of either agricultural productivity or social order; instead, this logic of entitlement suggests a paternalistic compassion for those unable to fend for themselves, a topic we will return to in a later chapter.

[72] Baker, ed., "Report," 93-96.

As for the considerable volume of relief grain brought into Pingding over the course of the crisis, we unfortunately lack evidence on whether, or how, age, sex and physical condition were used to determine relief entitlement. One November report by Shanxi's Provincial Relief Bureau focusing on emergency relief to 5th tier, or impoverished, families recounts that provincial agents toured afflicted villages throughout the province that month with local gentry in order to tally "households unable to carry on," after which the province dispatched a "preliminary relief distribution" of 8,200 *shi*, or 984,000 *jin*, to 13 Shanxi counties, of which 2,000 *shi*, or 240,000 *jin*, went to Pingding – enough to feed some 15,500 people for a month. State records also credit the bureau with bringing in a shipment of 1,919,232 *jin* of relief grain into Taiyuan from Tianjin the following month, although it is unclear what portion, if any, of this grain made it to Pingding itself. Similarly, in early 1921 the central state's Government Relief Bureau in Beijing, citing a turn to freezing temperatures, summoned agents from the Shanxi Provincial Relief Bureau to the rail head at Shijiazhuang, in central Zhili, to collect 2.5 million *jin* of relief grain and 20,000 sets of clothing for distribution at unspecified points back in Shanxi.[73]

Data for relief societies operating in Pingding are equally patchy. A Ministry of Communications accounting chart (cited in the last chapter) that found its way into the weekly publication of the central state, *Zhengfu gongbao*, broke down relief moving along the railroads during the month of December 1920. The chart lists nine relief organs shipping relief to Shanxi that month, five of which are listed as depositing relief grain at rail depots in Pingding: the Provincial Relief Bureau for 80,000 *jin*; a group called the Relief and Friendship Society of Pingding County for 327,900 *jin*; the Protestant Church of Ding County, Zhili, for 404,840 *jin*; a Chinese group called the Shanxi Drought Relief Society for 560,000 *jin*; and the Beijing-based

[73] *Laifu bao*, 28 Nov. 1920. *Zhengfu gongbao*, 13 June 1921. *Zhongguo minbao*, 21 Jan. 1921.

Buddhist Relief Society for 1,119,550 *jin*.[74] This nearly 2.5 million *jin* of relief food from all five groups could sustain roughly 161,290 people for the month – or over a half of the county population.

The group with the largest grain contribution above, the Buddhist Relief Society, was by its own measure that month operating in a total of 13 counties across north China, with Pingding its only field of operation in Shanxi. The other 12 counties in which this major Buddhist group was active were in western Zhili (with the exception of Fangshan County in the Beijing metropolitan area), and it is to the first of these counties to the east to which we now turn: mountainous, mineral-rich, and food-poor Jingxing County, in many respects Pingding's twin counterpart just over the border in Zhili.[75]

Jingxing County, Zhili

Farms in mountainous Jingxing County lay for the most part on sloping, rocky ground and their output did not meet the needs of the county's population. Wealthy households and the county's few resident grain merchants used profits from limestone, lead and coal deposits to import food each year from across the border in eastern Shanxi. Following eight rainless months in the region leading into the autumn of 1920, grain was being sourced from as far away as Henan Province and Datong in northern Shanxi. Already in October half the county's population of 250,000 were considered "stricken" by famine, which included even affluent households resorting to rice husks for food in the "utterly desperate" northern district of the county. Moreover, in a scourge shared by counties across the province, residents of the county's southern

[74] *Zhengfu gongbao*, 13 June 1921.
[75] *Haichao yin*, Dec. 1920.

district were suffering from robbery by soldiers roaming the area since their defeat nearby in the July war.[76]

To make matters worse, with the exception of a few flat corners of the county where water from nearby rivers was channeled for irrigation and where wells could in fact reach underground springs, most Jingxing residents had only the technological ability to dig to an insufficient 200-300 feet (20-30 *zhang*), leading to a severe lack of drinking water in the present crisis that forced many to fetch water over a trek of several dozen *li*. The Jingxing magistrate – who had raised $40,000 in loans from county coal-mining companies by the end of October and brought in 5,000 *shi*, or 600,000 *jin*, of grain from Henan and Shanxi for discount sale in the county – lamented this infrastructural inadequacy in a December appeal for assistance to the work-relief and well-drilling division of the Beijing-based North China Relief Society of statesman Liang Shiyi.[77]

Like Cang County, Jingxing was also the subject of a "special dispatch" to a Beijing newspaper by a county native studying in the capital, this time in the *Qunbao* daily by an unnamed student at home for the lunar New Year in the thick of winter 1921. Sixty percent of county households "could not carry on" without aid, he reported, a function, in part, of the effective closure of the county's half dozen major coal mines, which had in the past employed 20,000 workers earning 300 cash a day (enough to buy 6 *jin* of grain at *pingtiao* centers), monies that had now dried up. Nine of 10 coal miners had "suddenly" left their jobs, the student reported, leaving some 1,000-2,000 working for half their previous pay since mine owners were reportedly "struggling" through the crisis themselves. Rather than "crouch down and die," the young in particular had gone out thieving, the student explained, having heard in conversation during his

[76] *Shuntian shibao*, 14 Oct. 1920. *Jingxing XZ* 1934 15:9b; 15:23a.
[77] *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 31 Oct. 1920. *Shuntian shibao*, 13 Oct. 1920. *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 12 Dec. 1920.

stay that "this or that village" had been struck by incidents of theft "9 out of 10 days" amid cases of suicide by hanging or poisoning and the selling of women and children. The student noted that in "every village," oddly enough, "several hundred" chickens lay frozen to death after a recent snowfall, and the main county road was dotted with the old and frail perished from the cold.[78]

It is important, though, to note here the timing of this student's public appeal: unlike Cang's student missive, which had appeared at the outset of the crisis and more understandably lacked any mention of relief efforts, this Jingxing student's report hit the press months into the crisis and yet it, too, lacks any allusion at all to relief activity in the county. Yet, over a month earlier a group of Jingxing County merchant-gentry had posted an announcement in Beijing's *Yishibao* newspaper thanking two charity organizations for coming to the aid of 40,000 Jingxing residents in the last few weeks of 1920. Six men and a monk from Beijing's Buddhist Relief Society had, according to the announcement, worked with two men from Shanghai's Northern Work Relief Society to canvass Jingxing and distribute 800 *shi*, or 96,000 *jin*, of millet; 2,000 items of clothing, plus 800 items of children's clothing; 10,000 sacks (*bao*) of flour, or 1,600,000 *jin*; and 600,000 coppers (or enough to purchase possibly 120,000 *jin* of grain at *pingtiao* centers). In addition, the Buddhists – who had sent in monks conversant in the local dialect to preach the dharma to the local population[79] – had set up a home for "several hundred" refugee children under the age of 12 where they were taught reading and handicraft skills, while also

[78] *Qunbao*, 21 Feb. 1921.

[79] One of these monks, Tanxu, a native of Ninghe County, outside Tianjin, ran up against the more syncretic practices of local monks during his six-month stay in Jingxing. Tanxu's local counterparts incorporated folk and Daoist beliefs, broadening their religious practices to include the development of "supernatural and superhuman powers, chants and incantations for the endurance of cold, hunger, and other types of deprivation." "Tanxu's mission was to teach these people that the Buddha's path could help them transcend the suffering of this world," James Carter explains in a recent biography. "While relief workers provided food to keep the body alive, Tanxu preached that the physical world was not the ultimate reality. The eightfold path offered a way to eradicate hunger and thirst forever and completely." James Carter, *Heart of Buddha, Heart of China: the Life of Tanxu, a Twentieth-Century Monk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 92-3.

taking in 50 refugee children on behalf of Beijing's Zhongdetang, or Hall of Cultivating Virtue, and sending them on to the capital.[80]

A report in the Buddhist periodical *Haichao yin* ("Sound of the Tide") explains that part of this operation was carried out over a stretch of five days in mid-December at three Jingxing locations (the county seat, Hengkou and Yanfeng). After canvassing had determined that 60,000 residents were of "poor" status (a decidedly low figure compared to the 130,000 "stricken" reported above already in October, which may apply only to one of the distribution points in the county), the relief managers issued relief tickets to half of them – 30,000 widows, orphans and others who were alone. With four local Buddhists and county merchant-gentry "all in attendance to inspect the distribution," each adult received 5¼ *jin* of millet, 3 liters of bran and 18 coppers while children received 2.75 *jin* of millet, 1½ liters of bran and 10 coppers. Recognizing that this amount of relief was only enough to sustain the recipients for a month, and coupled with the fact that the operation excluded many thousand others among the afflicted, the report ends with a note that one of the named Buddhists was planning on returning with more relief in early 1921 and appeals to other Beijing and Shanghai societies for "continued relief."[81]

Turning to the Jingxing County gazetteer from 1934, we find confirmation that relief from outside "charities" had in fact been "continuously" coming into the county from the Fall of 1920 into the summer of 1921. The first group credited with arriving in the county was Beijing's Shunzhi Drought Relief Society in October with some 8,330 *jin* of wheat seeds for fall planting, followed by modest donations of $197 and 377 items of clothing in March of the next year. The

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[80] *Yishi bao*, 7 Jan. 1920. Three days later in February, the same Beijing daily that had printed the student letter from Jingxing, *Qunbao*, reported on the progress of disaster zone canvassing by male and female investigative teams from Beijing's leading foreign-founded Christian university, Yenching. Curiously, their report from two Zhili counties with Buddhist Relief Society operations reported already that winter, Xingtang and Lingshou, offers no indication of any Buddhist activity there at all. *Qunbao*, 24 Feb. 1921. *Haichao yin*, Dec. 1920.
[81] *Haichao yin*, Dec. 1920.

next group credited with a presence in the county was the above Buddhist Relief Society in December, which operated through July the following year with two other groups – the above Northern Work Relief Society and the Relief Society of the Shanghai Merchant Association – to distribute some 750,000 *jin* of grain, 155,350 *jin* of hemp seed, 18,358 sacks (*bao*), or 2,937,280 *jin*, of bran, 1.2 million coppers, and 3,600 items of clothing. The combined relief of these three groups was enough to feed roughly 45,362 people (or 18 percent of the county's population) over the six months to the end of the famine.[82] As mentioned above, the Buddhist group also took in 300 children into a home it established in the county run by one of its members, and sent another 200 children to a shelter the society ran in Beijing along with 50 others to a benevolence hall there.[83]

Arriving in January was Liang Shiyi's North China Relief Society, with distributions of $1,500, followed by the Peking United International Famine Relief Committee, which, through a resident pastor (presumably from the British China Inland Mission, whose slice of the north China mission field included Jingxing) to distribute over the next seven months 510,515 *jin* of millet, 5,670 kg of bean cakes, 215 quilts, 432 items of clothing, $15,085 for various relief projects (infant-nursing, well-digging, road repair and construction, and a school for the poor) and a formidable 2,000 tons of millet seeds.[84] Together with the Peking committee, Catholic officials (presumably the French Lazarists of West Zhili) distributed 900,000 *jin* of grain and 1,000 items of clothing. Also in January the Zhili Charity Relief Society distributed $8,438.6 and 700 items of clothing, returning in March with 21,616 *jin* of sorghum when an unidentified

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[82] This is based on the following calculation: 750,000 *jin* of grain, 155,350 *jin* of hemp seed, 18,358 *bao* of bran at 160 *jin* each (2,937,280 *jin*), and 1.2 million coppers purchasing 240,000 *jin* of *pingtiao* grain totalled 4,082,630 *jin* or 8,165,260 daily famine rations. (Hemp seed would have offered considerably more nutrition than the grains, but this is not factored in here.)

[83] *Jingxing XZ* 1934 15:23a-24a.

[84] It is more difficult to estimate the number of people relieved by this major society since it is unclear, for example, what portion of its relief monies were spent on food and how this massive amount of seed was used.

Japanese student also appeared in the county to give out 200 sets of children's clothing. Finally, in May, philanthropist Xiong Xiling's Beijing-based Beiwusheng relief society arrived in Jingxing with $7,000.

As we leave Jingxing for neighboring counties in the famine zone we should stress that, just as in Cang County, despite having a remarkably detailed accounting of relief coming in from outside, the Jingxing gazetteer offers little evidence of mutual-assistance by its residents in 1920-21. One modest exception to this silence appears in a life-sketch of a resident of the Jingxing village of Dalongwo. Fan Jixi, we hear, was a leather-trader whose business took him as far away as Beijing and Kalgan by the Great Wall. "He lived frugally and simply, and readily gave away his wealth," the gazetteer reads, and in 1920, with the county hit by famine, Fan was "quick to assist the afflicted poor, helping not a few people in the surrounding countryside through the disaster." Later, amidst the warlordism of the 1920s, this man "did his upmost to relieve those afflicted" by "liberally donating his own capital to public works," such as the repair of a stone bridge and the boring of holes for village wells – which, as we have seen, was a severe need in the county – all before his death at age seventy when his passing was met with "sad longing" by his neighbors.[85] For evidence of more substantial local relief activity, though, we must descend from the foothills of west Zhili to the north China plain and Jingxing's neighbor to the east, Yuanshi County.

South-central Zhili: Yuanshi, Gaoyi, Zhao & Ningjin counties

Local grain prices were nearly double their normal levels in the Fall of 1920 when residents of Yuanshi County started fleeing in groups west to the Shanxi highlands, a common destination for residents seeking to "eke out a living (*mousheng*)" even in "normal times

[85] *Jingxing XZ* 1934 11:15b.

(*pingshi*)," according to reports, although it is unclear what they ended up doing there.[86] Straddling the rail line running south from Beijing into Henan (and further down to the commercial hub of Hankou on the Yangzi), the fact that Yuanshi lay on a major channel of relief grain came as a mixed blessing earlier in 1920 when, during the July war, the Fengtian army had stationed troops at the county railhead for four days, consuming an unknown volume of local grain supplies. By the fall, with "no less than 90,000 stricken" out of a total population of 140,000, many in the villages were already subsisting on grass.[87]

News reports, however, offer glimpses of active relief in Yuanshi begun early in the crisis. By the end of October the county had dispatched agents to procure 10,000 *shi*, or 1,200,000 *jin*, of rice and sorghum in Henan for *pingtiao* operations using "donated" funds of $10,000 from local merchant-gentry. Headquartered at the county chamber of commerce, *pingtiao* centers were reportedly set up "in all of the county sub-districts." In December, it was reported that another five train cars' worth of *pingtiao* grain from Henan was on its way for discount sale, after which money would be sent back to acquire more. More significantly, however, investigators from the Tianjin Red Cross reported from Yuanshi in November that "local merchant-gentry were pushing through a relief plan in which village leaders raised money locally (*jiu di chou kuan*) for the establishment of soup kitchens in each village" in the county.[88]

Similar local activity can be glimpsed in Gaoyi and Zhao, counties abutting Yuanshi to the south and east. With crop failure of only 20 percent and a small population of some 65,000, gentry joined the magistrate of Gaoyi County, which sat on the rail line, in setting up five soup

[86] *Da gongbao*, 21 Nov. 1920.
[87] *Zhongguo minbao*, 15 Dec. 1920. *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 7 Nov. 1920.
[88] *Shuntian shibao*, 13 Oct. 1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 15 Dec. 1920. *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 7 Nov. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 21 Nov. 1920.

kitchens in its afflicted districts in November.[89] In the meantime, in Zhao, also relatively lightly hit by crop failure but with a much larger population of 215,000 and bereft of its own rail head, county authorities had sent agents to bring in a total of 12,000 *shi*, or 1,440,000 *jin*, of grain from Shanxi and Henan for *pingtiao* operations in August, an operation for which the magistrate would send for another 8,000 *shi*, or 960,000 *jin*, of Shanxi sorghum in late November. In Zhao, too, Tianjin Red Cross investigators visiting in the middle of November reported that wealthy gentry had assembled at the county offices and begun pooling donations for the establishment of soup kitchens in "each afflicted village."[90]

In similar fashion, the county of Ningjin, bordering Zhao to the southeast, sent agents in October to secure 3,000 *shi*, or 360,000 *jin*, of grain in Henan for *pingtiao* operations serving five locations in the county before sending merchants the following month to Henan and Shanxi to acquire another 10,040 *shi*, or 1,204,800 *jin*. Since the county lacked a railroad presence, grain was delivered to the railhead in neighboring Gaoyi County after which it was brought in to each of the Ningjin's *pingtiao* centers by cart. Native son Wang Huaiqing, who that year was the commandant of the gendarmerie of metropolitan Beijing and who will be a major figure in our next chapter on relief in the capital, sent in "several hundred *shi*" of sorghum to his home county. After this the county's Republican gazetteer said – rather dubiously considering the modest size of this shipment and the county's population of some 310,000 – "the famished no longer needed to flee." But it is again a report from the Tianjin Red Cross that suggests that extensive local relief was underway in November across the county: with 179 of its villages afflicted by mid-autumn, the county leadership had reportedly entrusted "donated funds mobilized through the county offices" to "village-run" soup kitchens, *pingtiao* operations, charity pawn offices and

[89] *Da gongbao*, 20 Nov. 1920.
[90] *Tianjin zhongmei ribao*, 31 Aug. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 1 Dec. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 20 Nov. 1920.

children's shelters. This is consistent with what this locality had done during the massive flood of 1917, which covered much of Zhili Province, when, according to the Ningjin gazetteer, the county pooled "several ten thousand dollars" from local merchant-gentry to finance the establishment of "several dozen" soup kitchens" around the county and the distribution of "several ten thousand" pieces of clothing.[91]

Evidence of locally-mobilized relief activity by these four contiguous counties is in fact mirrored by reports from a cluster of five counties up the rail line in north-central Zhili. There we also find soup kitchen construction underway as winter approached, reportedly bankrolled and executed by county merchant-gentry: the operations in Mancheng (population 102,000) included one feeding facility for every 4-5 villages, or one for every 7-8 smaller villages, in addition to six shelters for the "old and weak"; Ding County's (population 310,000) comprised a soup kitchen facility for every two villages plus a shelter for the old in the county seat; both Anxin (population 148,000) and Tang (population 230,000) counties were also establishing one soup kitchen for every two villages, to operate through March of 1921 in the case of Anxin; and Yi (population 268,000), which had had a relatively successful Fall harvest of over 60 percent, was running a total of six feeding facilities in its western and southern districts.[92] Whether all these operations lasted through the winter is uncertain since news reports caught them at their early stages.

This sphere of local relief activity, running roughly along the rail line in west Zhili, had caught the notice of at least one foreign relief agent in the region: "Chinese *in many places* have organized independent societies for relief," a field worker for an international relief committee relayed from southwest Zhili to his superiors in early February 1921. "They finance them *without aid from other than local sources*. They have established soup kitchens and are giving

[91] *Shuntian shibao*, 20 Oct. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 16 Nov. 1920. *Ningjin XZ* 1999 525. *Ningjin XZ* 1929 1:63b. *Da gongbao*, 25 Nov. 1920.
[92] *Shuntian shibao*, 1 Jan. 1921. *Mancheng XZ* 1997 18. *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 5 Dec. 1920.

excellent grain rations. In some places they give one and in others two meals a day. Whatever the number of meals, the ration is large. The man who gets it has all he wants. One of these chow *changs* [*zhouchang*] in Shuntefu cares for 2,000 refugees a day and on a festival day 2,700 were fed."[93]

For a detailed description of the operation of one such local soup kitchen in 1920-21 we must turn to one that made its way into the pages of Shanghai's *North China Herald* in February of 1921 when the English-language daily printed a dispatch from a relief station in the suburbs of Guide, a small city in eastern Henan. There, with famished refugees converging from the west and north of the province, the reporter found four to five hundred destitute sheltered and fed daily at a soup kitchen "entirely run by local Chinese." The "four local gentry" running the operation had "themselves largely subscribed" to the money and grain contributions, the latter "kept in large matting baskets… all sealed by having a board with carved characters pressed on the flattened surface." "This raises the characters in bold relief on the top surface of the grain," the reporter explained, "and not a handful could be abstracted without detection." Donations were posted on the walls and "none of the grain (was) taken for the daily feeding unless the full committee of four were in attendance… everything seem(ed) very open and above board." Such rudimentary theft-prevention techniques and the posting of accounts on the premises were indicative of a locally financed operation, accountable chiefly to the eyes and ears of the surrounding community. It was exceedingly rare for this sight to find its way into the treaty-port press in 1920-1 and, no less, into this most unabashedly pro-British mouthpiece whose correspondent deemed it "a great satisfaction" to find "benevolence instituted and carried on entirely

[93] The writer refers to Shunde, today's Xingtai, where more local relief activity appears to have occurred that year. Xingtai city's 2001 official history reads that in 1920 "city resident (*yi ren*) Yang Gengchen initiated and managed a soup kitchen feeding over 9,000 people a day," which, considering the wide discrepancy in attendance figures, was probably an altogether different and larger operation from the one cited by this relief worker. United International Relief Committee, "Famine Relief Work: Reports from Shuntefu," *Celestial Empire*, 5 Feb. 1921. Italics added. *Xingtai shizhi* 2001 964.

by Chinese without graft attached as far as one can see." "Real Charity in Kueiteh"–ran the headline–"Merciful Undertaking Without Any Squeeze."[94]

No doubt, meetings between magistrates and local merchant-gentry in places failed to come up with sufficient funds for soup kitchens on any county-wide scale, although any accurate rate of success or failure across the 1920 famine zone would be hard to arrive at considering the scarcity and very nature of the sources. One such failure comes from hard-hit Guangzong, a small county south of Ningjin on the Shandong border. Of the county's 90,000 residents in 1920 some 78,000 were deemed fully-afflicted by the famine. Guangzong did manage to set up a charity loaning center (*huojie suo*) and gentry-run grain discount centers at five locations around the county using Henan grain carted in some 100 *li* from the nearest railhead, efforts that together "saved the lives of the multitudes," according to the county's gazetteer of 1933, although to an unknown extent. But when community meetings in the Fall of 1920 determined that at least one soup kitchen for every ten villages had to be set up throughout the county for four to five months to feed 42,000 destitute residents unable to carry on without help, not even three percent of the minimum funds needed to do so – $1,040 out of an estimated $40,000-50,000 – were raised, leaving the magistrate to lament this fundraising failure in a written appeal to a major Beijing relief society for emergency relief. The Tianjin Red Cross investigators reporting active county-wide soup kitchens elsewhere in the province confirmed that Guangzong in 1920 indeed had "no coordinated local relief effort beyond *pingtiao*." Yet again, though, we should hesitate before assuming that any reported county-level failure to fundraise for local relief necessarily meant a complete absence of relief activity at lower levels of a locality: a biography in Guangzong's Republican gazetteer, for example, does recount that a native of the Guangzong County seat was in fact entrusted with the management of a soup kitchen in 1920 that

[94] *North China Herald*, 21 Feb. 1921.

saved "a multitude of lives" there – this in a county that had by other accounts failed to establish such facilities.[95]

Rural relief activity thus remains an elusive phenomenon for the researcher, since rural communities in the famine epicenter of south Zhili evidently generated relief for themselves well "under the radar" in 1920, running on channels greased as much with personal trust and traditional modes of transport as they were with publicity and the well-documented rail system. While south Zhili was, as a whole, more densely populated than the North of the province, roughly ninety percent of its population was scattered in rural districts or in cities of less than 10,000,[96] and anyone tapping into granary or household reserves to administer village or town-level relief in 1920 would have done so far less visibly – that is from provincial or national gazes – than their coastal counterparts sending grain in from great distances, with all the publicity and paperwork that involved (long-distance relief agents as a rule, according to press reports, applied for provincial passports, or *huzhao*, to have their non-profit goods pass tax-free to the zone). If we turn to the month in 1920-21 for which we do have rail records detailing relief – the accounting spread for organizations applying for tax-free freight passports in December 1920 appearing in the central government's *Zhengfu gongbao* – we do find relief grain movement over the rails on behalf of Zhili county governments, however modest: 72,000 *jin* brought into Handan by its county leadership; 1,290,240 *jin* shipped by Anxin to the railhead in neighboring Xushui; 64,512 *jin* shipped by mountainous Lingshou to the railhead in neighboring Zhengding; 96,768 *jin* sent by unafflicted Tangshan east of Tianjin across the province to Neiqiu where one Han Jingzhou is credited with bringing in another 161,280 *jin*; 32,256 *jin* shipped to neighboring Yuanshi by one Zhang Qianguang on behalf of the Zanhuang government; and 530,000

[95] Guangzong XZ 1933 1:15a, 14:20a. *Da gongbao*, 24 Oct. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 31 Oct. 1920. *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 20 Feb. 1921. *Da gongbao*, 11 Dec. 1920.
[96] Milton Stauffer, ed., *The Christian Occupation of China: A General Survey of the Numerical Strength and Geographical Distribution of the Christian Forces in China* (Shanghai: Special Committee on Survey and Occupation, 1918-1921, China Continuation Committee, 1922), 59-61, 68, 81, 299-300, 308.

jin brought into Xingtai by the Xingtai self-government assembly (*zizhi hui*), presumably for the soup kitchen operations named above.[97] (The sum total of 2,247,056 *jin* for these shipments amounted to daily relief rations for some 150,000 adults for the month.)

This less visible relief presumably travelled along the commercial and social networks forming the market system delineated by William Skinner, was informed by traditional letter and oral news network examined by Henrietta Harrison in her study of rural Shanxi, and mobilized by the political connections comprising the nexus proposed by Prasenjit Duara in his study of villages in Zhili and northwest Shandong. Further frustrating the historian seeking out famine-relief documentation, historian Zhang Xin has shown how in north Henan twenty years before our famine, relief transport expenses were hidden in the accounting of what was on the face of it a totally unrelated socio-political organ, namely the Bureau of Wagon and Horse (*che ma ju*). This was an elite-sponsored institution that apparently existed in all northern Henan counties in the late Qing for chauffeuring visiting officials, and in this case the bureau's local chairman – a member of an elite literary society that was an instrumental organizer of relief circa 1900 – arranged for cart owners to lend their vehicles to a local famine relief effort in exchange for waiving their annual dues to the bureau.[98] Hardly obsolete, cart traffic later in the century posed vigorous competition with trains, a fact evidenced by a Chinese Eastern (Manchuria) Railway report from 1924: "In the period between 1916 and 1920, quantities of grain shipped over the

[97] *Zhengfu gongbao*, 13 June 1921.

[98] Three degree-holders in Ji County, north Henan, formed a literary society in 1880s sponsoring home gatherings to discuss readings. By the turn of the century, the book club had become "one of the major elite establishments in Ji County," Zhang Xin explains. "The key members of the society exerted substantial influence on community affairs at the county level." One member of the literary group initiated the plan to acquire carts for the transport of rice across the Yellow River during famine at the turn of the century while another member was, in 1900, through connections with native northern Henan officials of the Qing court, put "in charge of apportioning relief goods in Jiyuan County, an assignment he carried out with the help of his friends in the literary society." The district chief later put them in charge of a similar region-wide effort. "The three enlisted many of their friends from the literary society to assist in distributing relief items in Neihuang and Anyang counties in Zhangde prefecture, Ji and Hui counties in Weihui prefecture, and Xiuwu County in Huaiqing prefecture." Zhang Xin, *Social Transformation in Modern China: the State and Local Elites in Henan, 1900-1937* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 96-100.

C.E.R. ceased to give a correct picture of the effective grain surplus in North Manchuria, owing to the tremendous growth of native cart traffic exporting cereals directly to Changchun, or to the Kirin-Changchun Railway."[99] One foreign witness in 1920-1 described a scene of "long caravans of grain-carrying carts" in front of his home just north of Zhili in Fengtian, today's Liaoning Province, "big freight carts pulled by seven mules, and smaller carts pulled by three…escorted by government troops…The carts came by the hundreds, passing our front gate for days on end."[100] Finally, China's extensive, if decaying, canal system acted as a third artery of movement in 1920 on top of carts and rail cars. A young Philadelphia Quaker en route to an extended stay with Chinese family friends in south Zhili described "a continuous line of boat sledges piled high with country produce" in her journey on the frozen Grand Canal in December 1920. She recorded passing by "Bushels of hulled rice. Red corn. Golden millet. Peanuts in hull…" as "small boys and girls darted through the more serious traffic on small sledge boats, pushed forward in the same way as ours, miraculously escaping accident by fractions of an inch."[101]

Xinhe County

Sharing a border with Ningjin, Xinhe was one of the hardest-hit counties in 1920, reckoned by China Inland Mission investigators to have been 100% impoverished due to back-to-back crises in the years leading up to the drought.[102] Small in territory but with a sizeable population of some 183,000, Xinhe was also especially isolated from the railroad, situated equally distant from the Beijing-Hankou line to the west and Tianjin-Jinan line to the east. Xinhe's Republican gazetteer, from the perspective of its year of publication, 1929, paints an

[99] Chinese Eastern Railway, *North Manchuria and the Chinese Eastern Railway* (Harbin: C.E.R Printing Office, 1924), 9, 74.
[100] Tharp, *White Chinese*, 108-9.
[101] Nora Waln, *The House of Exile* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1935), 17-8.
[102] Fuller and Liang, eds., "Statement of Aims," 9.

especially bleak picture of the county, explaining that "since the establishment of the Republic governance has been unstable and warlords have taken over, sparing no effort to plunder; the local gentry also seized the opportunity to be self-serving, to lend out at high interest rates, and to generally exploit the people and oppress able-bodied farmhands…" The region had been blanketed with the floodwaters of the broken dykes in 1917, and with the arrival of full-fledged famine in 1920, "countless" perished, "weary of the prolonged drought" that pushed "previously honest and good-natured people" to roam for away or "loaf about without decent occupation and assuming cunning ways," with bands of thieves "tempting model workers and the young to follow their ways." In the winter of 1920, county authorities and police were reportedly helpless in the face of plundering bandits, with several surprise attacks occurring each night, leading even the wealthy to "live in fear" and flee to the county seat. More, the county magistrate in the months leading into the 1920 drought was dismissed from his post for inadequate estimation of the scale of the looming disaster and was replaced.[103] In light of this volatile, predatory environment in which even the wealthy "lived in fear" it is surprising that Xinhe in 1920 was able to mobilize relief at all.

On the eve of famine in September 1920, a new magistrate, Zeng Xiren, assumed leadership of Xinhe and cabled a desperate plea to the Interior Ministry: rainless for well over a year, nine-tenths of the county had become a disaster zone. Zeng conferred with local gentry throughout the county and established a relief and price-leveling office (*zhentiaoju*) headed by the county finance chief. And just as we had seen in Pingding earlier in this chapter, the Xinhe relief office was managed in part by local education officials, who often came from the ranks of local literati.[104] The first order of business of the Xinhe relief office, according to the county

[103] *Xinhe XZ* 1929 4:11a-12b.
[104] *Zhonghua minguo shi dang'an ziliao huibian*, 379. *Xinhe XZ* 1929 1:21b-22a.

gazetteer, was to secure emergency relief from the governor of an extremely modest 26,414 coppers for distribution to the county's most impoverished households, before "inviting" merchants and wealthy residents to lend $12,000 at interest for two bulk purchases of *pingtiao* grain. (Eventually, the gazetteer notes, "all" loaned capital was returned with interest honored). The gazetteer then lists relief deliveries over the course of the crisis as follows: $500 cash and a shipment of cotton clothes from the Government Relief Bureau in Beijing; 1,500,000 coppers from the Provincial Relief Bureau plus spring relief of millet, corn and seeds totaling a modest 200 *shi*, or 24,000 *jin*; 1,500,000 coppers and $200 from a Chinese group called the Zhili Charity Relief Society (after which the society sent a Catholic representative to investigate homes in the spring, handing out unspecified amount of relief grain three times to the "destitute," each adult receiving four *sheng*, or liters, each child two *sheng*); $850 from the Disaster Relief Society of Ji Prefecture, of which Xinhe was part; 871 items of clothing from the Native-Place Relief Society of Ji Prefecture; finally, the county itself raised donations for soup kitchens totaling $886, with donations of "around" $10 from local officials and the heads of various local organs.

It is unclear to what extent this incoming relief was effective; while the amounts listed in the gazetteer would have been enough to sustain only a small fraction of the county's stricken population through the famine, the gazetteer's narrative for that year does not include any mention of mass mortality either. Nor does it give any indication of whether, or to what extent, Xinhe residents in this volatile environment came to the assistance of their neighbors. The estimation made by outside investigators that the county was 100 percent destitute in 1920 suggests mutual aid in Xinhe communities that year was an impossibility. Yet if one turns to the section of "filial and benevolent" biographies in a later volume of the same 1929 gazetteer one finds details of a soup kitchen set up in 1920 in Sutian, a town well south of the Xinhe county

seat, that was by all appearances a locally-initiated and funded operation. Eight managers, two of whom were also on a list of 25 donors, or "philanthropists (*shanshi*)," administered donations of 1,580 *diao*, or strings of 1,000 cash, enough to feed 260 people for six months, an operation similar in scope to the Henan soup kitchen profiled in the *North China Herald* above. All but four of the 31 people listed as participating in this charitable endeavor were surnamed Zhang, and judging by their full names, the operation was dominated by four sets of brothers along with one woman donor surnamed Mao. One of these men, Zhang Shoupu, whose 400 *diao* to the soup kitchen was the largest donation listed, is elsewhere in the gazetteer described as a native of Sutian who had "promoted education and the public welfare" with a donation of four *mu* of land to a village school, a popular object of charitable giving in Qing and, especially Republican, biographies.[105]

It might be pointed out that these Sutian residents in 1920 were following the precedent set by at least one fellow Xinhe resident, Xu Hongfei, who is remembered elsewhere in the gazetteer for "saving the starving en masse" during the "great famine" of 1877 by dispensing congee and keeping a reported "10,000 families" alive through a post-famine epidemic with free medicine handouts. Along with education and poor relief, funding and organizing bandit-defense teams was also considered an act of charity for the benefits it brought to defenseless residents. It might also be pointed out that Wu Yongpei, a salaried graduate of the first degree who was commended by the president of the Republic for his role in raising money and managing *pingtiao* operations during Xinhe's famine of 1920, was also credited in his biography for raising money from local merchants and gentry to create a self-defense team against the bandits

[105] *Xinhe XZ* 1929 4:56b-57a. The estimate of people fed is based on a low daily ration of 1,500 calories and a price of 5 coppers (or 50 cash) per *jin*, which was what the American Red Cross paid for its relief grain in a nearby part of the famine zone.

afflicting the county throughout the famine year of 1920-21, a combination of charitable works and investment in local defense that was often praised in the same breath in local biographies.[106]

Nangong County

To the southeast, Nangong's population of 250,000 in 1920 faced an equally dire situation: over 12 rainless months by the start of the famine, the selling off of cattle by farmers for as low as $5 a head, flight to neighboring counties, and tree bark widely eaten as food. Information on Nangong's relief activity in 1920 is even less readily available than that of its neighbors, but a handful of news reports at least suggest that considerable state relief came to the area. "Relief grain has already been rushed in and handed out," magistrate Ding Zhongli acknowledged in a December appeal for relief clothing from the Government Relief Bureau in Beijing, adding that "fundraising for winter clothing remains a pressing need." Cross-referencing this statement with Ministry of Communications accounting for relief running along the rails in that same month of December, Nangong lay at the center point of a triangle formed by the railheads in Gaoyi County and Xingtai city on the Beijing-Hankou line and the railhead of Sangyuan, in Wuqiao County, on the Tianjin-Jinan line, all which received bulk shipments of Government Relief Bureau grain in December, some as large as half a million kilos, portions of which may well have reached Nangong by cart.[107]

As for the possibility of relief sourced from *within* Nangong's stricken communities, the county's gazetteer from 1936 recounts the charitable deeds of one resident, Ma Benkui. A native of the village of Guanlicun, Ma had in the drought year 1900 issued his own grain reserves to

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[106] Another example of this gentry mix of philanthropy and valor was a man we examined above, the Cang County resident Liu Fengwu in the nineteenth century, a phenomenon that speaks to Philip Kuhn's study of the martial role of the rural gentry in the late imperial period. *Xinhe XZ* 1929 4:56b, 4:20:41b, 4:20:43a. *Cang XZ* 1933 8:166b. Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its* Enemies.

[107] *Shuntian shibao*, 10 Aug. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 28 Dec. 1920; *Zhengfu gongbao*, 13 June 1921.

help people in the surrounding countryside, according to his biographical entry, before assisting over 200 "helpless residents" of his village through the famine of 1920 with distributions of cash and rice. (It might be noted too that on at least two occasions Ma was known to have given grain and money to poor local families after encountering abandoned infants on the street so that they could be nursed to health and raised.)

A second Nangong resident is credited with relief acts over the same stretch of crises, this time in a 1924 grave inscription printed in the same gazetteer: Han Hegui of the town of Qiangaozhuang had been active in bandit resistance and famine relief during the 1900 drought, according to his gravestone, before "relieving stricken neighbors in the countryside" in 1920. Both of these men were acting in a long local tradition of charity relief activity related in the county gazetteer, which includes several dozen examples of Ming and Qing-era local relief efforts in the form of village soup kitchen operation and grain handouts during flood, drought and locust infestations up and through the great famine of the late 1870s as well as the lengthy texts of two stone steles commemorating the establishment of Daoguang and Guangxu-era county charity granaries and donations of grain by the public to these institutions in 1830 and 1878, respectively.[108]

Wei County

Having crossed Zhili on a southeastward trek from Shanxi, we arrive at Wei County, which bordered Shandong during the Republic. Wei was as far from the railroad as any county in south Zhili, and 90 percent of its 163,000 residents had been rendered destitute by the 1920 food crisis, according to investigations by a Beijing relief group. Despite this level of crisis, the

[108] *Nangong XZ* 1936 16:11a-16:26a, 24:46a-47a, 24:51a-54a, 16:25b, 24:60b-61ab.

county received little coverage at all in the urban press; the little light we can shed on Wei's experience of the famine comes from the county gazetteer of 1929.

Wei was in the mission field of the French Jesuits of southeast Zhili and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, and the gazetteer reports considerable relief from the mission community in 1920, particularly the Protestant mission, which drew in relief donations worth $19,491.81 from various countries as well as $6,750 from Chinese Christians in the Philippines. Wei apparently sat in an active wider mission field: neighboring Qinghe County to the east, which was under the same Catholic and Protestant jurisdictions, had, according to its gazetteer, also benefited from mission largesse in 1920 when both Catholic and Protestant groups kept some 10,000 residents alive there with relief operations.[109]

Wei's gazetteer also lists substantial relief from the major relief society in the capital, the Peking United International Famine Relief Committee, which distributed 15,000 grain tickets of $5 each for a total of $75,000 in the county in 1920-21. Although this quasi-official organ received a majority of its funding from Chinese across the country and was comprised of both prominent Chinese and foreign figures in the capital, the gazetteer lists its 1920 contribution in a passage in its religion section entitled "temporary relief by the Protestant Church in 1920," which is doubtless a function of the fact that the Peking society used, primarily, missionary channels for its canvassing and relief distribution across its west Zhili field of operations, as we have seen, for example, in its relief in Jingxing County. In other words, aside from a bond program instituted by the Wei County magistrate to raise money for *pingtiao* operations, and aside from what was presumably an official orphanage (*pin'gu'er yuan*) housing 400 children in a downtown Wei city Confucian temple, which was established temporarily in 1920 and

[109] *Wei XZ* 1929 16:37a, 16:36ab. *Qinghe XZ* 1934 13:26a.

dismantled by the gazetteer's publication in 1929, Wei's gazetteer offers no apparent accounting for relief in 1920 from social circles unconnected to the Christian presence.

If, however, one reviews the Wei gazetteer's biographical section, there appears to be considerable relief precedent set by natives during the humanitarian disasters of the late 1870s and 1900, which is worth summarizing here since it appears to have remained active into our famine. This local legacy includes a member of a notably charitable family who is said to have maintained 170 households in his village with grain and money handouts in 1879, four years into the horrific famine of the Guangxu reign; another who donated 600 strings of 1,000 cash to the starving in 1877-78 and raised work-relief donations of 1,600 strings of 1,000 cash, before donating 500 *shi* of millet, 40 *mu* of land, and a building to establish a village charity granary named the Renxutang, or Hall of Sympathy, in 1885; finally, in 1900 this same man issued 100 *shi* of grain and 1,000 strings of 1,000 cash to the famished. In that same year of 1900 another resident answered an official call for donations from the wealthy by giving out 300 strings of 1,000 cash to the stricken, later selling 20 *mu* of land and using the proceeds to relieve "many" in his village. Another Wei resident in 1908 issued 1,600 strings of 1,000 cash in disaster relief and another 130 strings to the local poor. Grave inscriptions in later volumes of the gazetteer also recount the actions of residents in the famines of the late 1870s, 1885 and 1900, while the gazetteer also lists the names of donors to the county granary in the Guangxu era of the late nineteenth century.[110]

In similar fashion, in our famine, Sun Jiujing "saved countless people" in 1920 by "issuing a large amount of stored grain to neighbors and kin in the countryside," according to his biography. Xu Sishi is said to have donated 30 *shi* to the granary in the late 1870s, issued money to the famished in the 1900 drought, and, in 1920, "issued capital to assist the poor through the

[110] *Wei XZ* 1929 16:38b, 16:39b, 16:41b, 16:42b, 19:24a, 19:25a, 19:37b, 16:31a-35a.

famine." Liu Huaisi, a national university student active in local relief in 1877 and 1900 who was forced to flee from robbers to neighboring Nangong County amid drought disaster in 1920, exhausted his cotton supplies before fleeing in the form of handouts to the stricken poor in the village, many of whom were reportedly saved by his act. The entire biographical entry of one man known for his "charitable spirit," Liu Qingwu, relates that "in every disaster year" in the early Republic he issued millet as relief to neighbors, "saving untold lives." Resident An Liming is similarly introduced as having a "charitable spirit" after having distributed millet as relief "in every disaster year." Then Yin Qishu, a native of the village of Wangcun who left for Hubei Province to serve as a military commander there, is said to have "repeatedly" sent men with relief supplies back to his native village in Wei in 1920-21, actions for which "no villager was without gratitude."[111]

Finally, the biography of one Wei County man is worth special attention for the detail it offers on the response of an entire village to the 1920 famine. Zhang Jiusheng was a native of Zhangjiazhuang, which was described as resting in one of the hardest hit areas of Wei County in 1920. The village's middling and poorer families (*zhong hu yixia*) took stock of their possessions and mortgaged or sold off land, clothing and other resources as "temporary coping measures" at the onset of the food crisis, reads his biography, but were soon nonetheless "filling the streets" in desperation. It was then that Zhang joined with the village headman and other villagers with "shared resolve (*tongzhi*)" to hold a public meeting at which the possibility was discussed of using "all grain reserves in the village for emergency relief." Several named heads of wealthy village households then "expressed unanimous consent" to draw up a plan in which aid would be distributed to the poor on the following condition: all recipient households possessing less than 40 *mu* of land that were later unable to repay the assistance given them would be exempted from

[111] *Wei XZ* 1929 11:18b, 16:39ab, 16:40a, 16:43b, 16:44b, 16:46a.

doing so, while recipient households with more than 40 *mu* would be required to repay within three years. At the appointed time of repayment in 1923, though, with many villagers still carrying debts from 1920 that they were unable to pay off, Zhang collected all the debt contracts drawn up in the famine year and, along with a second villager who had hatched the original relief plan with him, burned them in the presence of all "as a demonstration of charity (*yong shi shishe zhi yi*)."[112] So reads Zhang's biography in its entirety.

Earlier in this chapter we saw a similar debt forgiveness in 1920 by a villager in Nanpi County to the northeast, and it should be noted that Pierre-Étienne Will also found this practice in local records from 18th century Zhili in which "charitable people" in times of strife "granted loans and burned the contracts afterward."[113] We might mention one additional, if rather dramatic example, of debt forgiveness from the Qing if only because it brings us back full circle to Cang County where we began this chapter.

Zhang Ji, a man born in the 17th century and described as the great-grandson of a degree-holder**,** was, according to his gazetteer biography, known to have "taken wealth lightly and enjoyed giving it away." Several hundred local families relied on him to carry on (literally, to "fire their hearths," or *juhuo*). "One day" Zhang "invited debtors from all over to his home and to all the poor who could not repay, he cancelled their debts by handing out several tens of thousands of gold (*shu wan jin*) on the spot." Later, in the famine year of 1702, Zhang donated 500 *shi* of relief rice to relief efforts, apparently exhausting his wealth. When debts were due at the end of the year, two friends put down clothes to the pawnshop to release 80 gold pieces (*jin*

[112] *Wei XZ* 1929 16:46a.
[113] Will, *Bureaucracy and Famine*, 139.

fen), which they presented to their now-destitute friend Zhang as a gift.[114] Such figures, however eccentric, lived on no doubt in the public memory.

Finally, a few things should be stressed in closing about our case from Wei County: Zhang Jiusheng, the villager with no other community roles or accomplishments specified in his biography, took the initiative in 1920 to broker a village-wide relief program before approaching the man formally administering the village – the village head. Similarly, as we have seen, a member of the gentry took the initiative in creating and financing a village-level grain-distribution program at the other end of the famine zone in Pingding. While formal representatives of the modern state apparatus were present in these villages, this did not preclude local residents from carrying on relief methods in more private capacities just as gentry had undertaken initiatives over the centuries across the region as far back as the Ming. Only with the respect of his peers – who entrusted precious food reserves to his scheme without any way of knowing whether future harvests might replenish them, which consecutive harvests had failed to do in the disastrous 1870s – could Zhang have carried out such a plan, and gotten his peers to agree to a debt amnesty afterwards, no less. Similar to Henrietta Harrison's gentry subject in Shanxi, Liu Dapeng, Zhang clearly had an informal authority – a cultural, moral authority – in the village, one that stemmed from the "cultural nexus of power" theorized by Prasenjit Duara, and one illegible to outsiders searching out church, state or police-like institutions of social relief and order.

Secondly, it should be remembered that Zhang's village rested in one of the hardest-hit corners of a county reported to be nine-tenths destitute in 1920, and in a county as far from the railroad as any in south Zhili. Identifying a village-wide relief program and debt amnesty in such a corner of the famine zone suggests that, even where the sources are silent, the possibility of

[114] *Cang XZ* 1933 8:131b.

devastated communities taking care of their own in 1920-21 as many had tried to do in the previous disaster of the 1870s must not be discounted. Fortunately, as we turn now to Beijing, and later to the exodus of refugees into major urban centers on the fringes of the famine zone and further into the fertile northeastern provinces of Manchuria, we turn also to areas of the country with a considerably higher concentration of sources with which to piece together events in 1920-21.

Chapter Three

Beijing: poor relief and the reception of refugees, 1920-21

One evening in October 1920, three refugees lay dead from knife wounds in a small temple in Beijing. Their hunger "unbearable," Zhang Hong and his older sister had slashed themselves and a three-year old relative before police retrieved their bodies and conveyed them to a charity graveyard for burial with three coffins provided by the state. Within the week, Xie Yutang and twelve other men and women freshly arrived in the city were seen seated behind a temple by Xizhi gate exhibiting stoic patience in the face of starvation, having gone without food for 4-5 days and "waiting to die." Death had come to the back alleys of the Chinese capital in alarming numbers as famished bodies trudged into the city and soaring food prices ate up the meager incomes of the resident poor.

The following week a refugee woman named Wang and her nine year-old daughter were found wandering in the city "with no friends or relatives to take them in," after which police checked them together into a workhouse set up by the city for indigent women. Several weeks later a batch of two hundred people appeared from the south in Beijing, where they were met by gendarmes and escorted to a city shelter for refugees. In a teahouse in January, a police detective – apparently acting on an order that week from the Beijing chief of police to raid brothels and bring refugee women there to city shelters – collared a "gangster" and the young woman he had "sweet-talked" into prostitution after she had fled her home in the famine zone and failed to find relatives in the capital. A few weeks later, when refugee Wang Chenglin held

up his seven year-old son for sale on a city street, a pedestrian handed him five dollars, urging him to keep his son and try and "make a living" with the money, after which the father thanked the stranger, hoisted his son onto his back, and left.[1]

The common thread to these reports from Beijing newspapers in 1920-21 is that all of them involved refugees from a single corner of the famine zone – drought-ridden Shen County, in central Zhili – providing glimpses into the varied fates of men, women, and children making nearly the same journey of desperation to the capital that year. There can be little doubt that the hundreds of Shen County natives who convened one Beijing night in early October to form a relief society and pool money for their home county were alarmed and driven in part by stories of distressed natives of their home county in the press.[2] But while bodies of the dead appeared throughout the famine year, alone or in batches of two or three, in Beijing back-alleys and under bridges, corpse sightings were far outstripped by incidents, large and small, in which authorities, charities or individual strangers stepped in to help feed, house and clothe local destitute or those streaming in from afar, at least judging by the city's prodigious local news output. News reports frequently went beyond offering general reports of masses of faceless refugees to brief profiles of men and women caught up in the unfolding crisis. For example, when patrolling soldiers, flood-gate workers or farmers pulled individuals or whole families to safety from well shafts or icy canals in Beijing,[3] inquiring reporters were able to put names, origins and occupations to the distressed, and confirm that hunger had driven them to suicide. In the more "normal" year of 1919, poverty was apparently the most common factor behind the 210 recorded suicide attempts

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[1] *Shihua*, 3 Oct. 1920. *Shihua*, 13 Oct. 1920. *Shihua*, 17 Oct. 1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 24 Oct. 1920. *Guobao*, 27 Jan. 1921. *Xiao gongbao*, 29 Jan. 1921. *Chenbao*, 21 Feb. 1921. *Guobao*, 24 March 1921.
[2] *Shihua*, 1 Oct. 1920.
[3] Examples of strangers intervening in suicide attempts by drowning appear in *Shihua*, 13 Sept. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 13 Oct. 1920. *Shihua*, Oct. 21 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 29 Oct. 1920. *Beijing baihuabao*, 5 Nov. 1920. *Xiao minbao*, 28 Jan. 1921. *Beijing baihuabao*, 29 Jan. 1921. *Guobao*, 24 March 1921. *Fengsheng*, 10 Apr. 1921.

in Beijing, ahead of family troubles and disease, and comprising 52 of 210 cases.[4] Destitution undoubtedly took a higher proportion of them in 1920-21.

"As people fled from the drought-stricken countryside in search of sustenance, refugees began arriving at the gates of Peking, knowing that grain was available," Susan Naquin writes of the great famine of the 1870s when the capital lay, as it also did in 1920, on the edge of the disaster zone. "As their numbers grew, grain prices rose in the city; new soup kitchens, benevolent halls, fire brigades, shelters, and orphanages became active, and large amounts of discounted grain were sold off in a struggle to keep the price down."[5] As we will see, this level of activity in the capital could just as well serve as a description of Beijing in 1920-21. This chapter seeks to help answer the question of why so many fewer people died in 1920-21 than might have been expected by examining the role that an urban community on the periphery of the famine zone dealt with its own food crisis and absorbed refugees from near and far. We will chart the opening and closing of *pingtiao* centers, soup kitchens and shelters over the year, as well as the official and charitable handouts of grain, cash and winter clothes that sustained a substantial part of the city's resident and refugee population through the crisis. This chapter also seeks to identify some of the faces behind official and charitable relief in the early Republic, and therefore shed light on the social ties and networks at play in charities of the period. Some of the largest figures in our discussion will include prominent military figures in the metropolitan region, especially Wang Huaiqing, the commander of the Beijing gendarmerie, which patrolled the poor capital suburbs and roads leading into the city, and a lesser-known military figure, General Jiang Yucheng, the founder of several city charities active through the year.

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[4] Gamble, *Social* Survey, 418.
[5] Naquin, *Peking*, 662.

Surprisingly little has been written on the charities of Republican Beijing. The northern city during the Republic most thoroughly treated in Lillian Li's work on famine in the North is neighboring Tianjin, for which she offers a detailed account of state and extragovernmental relief following the devastating Zhili floods of 1917. But Tianjin was north China's main treaty-port, and so was hardly a representative Chinese urban community; the relative wealth of attention given to Tianjin and its social relief institutions unfortunately do not say much about the capital city lying some sixty miles to the northwest.[6] David Strand's *Rickshaw Beijing* from 1989 broke new ground on state-society relations in the Republican capital and the political consciousness of its residents, while offering great detail on the struggles for livelihood by its middling and laboring classes. Through the examination of changes to its urban space, the consumption and lifestyle of its inhabitants, and the cultural representations of China's (on-and-off again) capital, Madeleine Yue Dong's more recent *Republican Beijing* set out to challenge teleological narratives of an emerging modernity in Chinese cities stemming from a scholarly overemphasis on treaty-port culture – one that, in her words, reinforced the "tendency to equate the modern and the Western and by prioritizing the aspects of modernity expressed through bourgeois culture." In so doing, Dong edges closer to a fuller historical take on city life by "recognizing the active, creative ways in which the residents of Beijing dealt with the political, social, and cultural changes of their times." Neither of these important works, however, has shed much light on poor relief in early Republican Beijing, a sphere of activity surprisingly intertwined with the better-known cultural phenomena playing out in the city's many theaters, art galleries and even brothels,

[6] Lillian Li, *Fighting Famine*, 285-95. Other studies of Tianjin charities include Vivienne Shue, "The Quality of Mercy: Confucian Charity and the Mixed Metaphors of Modernity in Tianjin," *Modern China* 32/4 (2006), 411-52; Ruth Rogaski, "Beyond Benevolence: A Confucian Women's Shelter in Treaty-Port China," *Journal of Women's History* 8/4 (Winter 1997), 54-90. Ren Yunlan, *Jindai Tianjin de cishan yu shehui jiuji* [Charity and social relief in modern Tianjin] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chuban she, 2007). Caroline Reeves used Tianjin as her case study for the growth of the Red Cross in a Chinese city: Caroline Beth Reeves, "The Power of Mercy."

or even with the duties of its garrison officers and police on patrol. While Dong's section in *Republican Beijing* on "Poverty, Crime, and Prostitution," for example, reviews the findings of 1920s sociologists on the nature and severity of poverty in the city, it says next to nothing about what was actually done about it, leaving the reader with a cold, if bustling, picture of Beijing's social landscape, one consistent with the callous nature ascribed to the Chinese "national character" in orientalist sociologies of the period, which will be explored in a later chapter of this study.[7]

Similarly, while Janet Chen's work on public perceptions and policies toward the urban poor in early 20th century China is an important addition to the scholarship on poor relief in the modern period, it focuses on what she calls "significant departures" from traditional poor relief practices during the Republican period, such as the "criminalization of poverty" and the sprouting of both official and charity workhouses devoted to instilling industriousness into the ranks of the poor. "This marked an important shift," Chen argues, "for with the advent of these institutions, and throughout the Republican era to follow, the combination of labor and incarceration would become the central tenet of poor relief in both government and private realms."[8] As we will see in this chapter, such institutions no doubt existed in good number in 1920-21 Beijing, but the sheer diversity of relief agents and types over the year suggest that the case for a dramatic rupture from traditional forms of charity in the early Republic is overstated, at least as of 1920-21. Sustenance and clothing to Beijing's needy over the year, both to city residents and migrants, were in some cases systematically provided, in others haphazardly pieced

[7] David Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing: City People and Politics in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). Madeleine Yue Dong, *Republican Beijing: the City and Its Histories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 7, 12, 214-28.
[8] Janet Yi-chun Chen, "Guilty of Indigence," 56. Wang Juan's recent monograph on charity in greater Beijing in the late Qing and early Republic is also a welcomed addition to the literature, although it unfortunately sweeps over its subject without offering any of the personality it might convey. Wang Juan, *Jindai Beijing cishan shiye yanjiu* (A study of the charities of modern Beijing) (Beijing: Renmin chuban she, 2010).

together, through an array of private and official sources *without condition* beyond, in most cases, proof of need. More importantly, the men and women behind these lifesaving activities were too diverse in occupation, politics, and creed to allow for any generalization on which social sphere or political outlook in Beijing society cornered the market on attention to the downtrodden. Just as it was in the wider famine relief effort, the prominence of Beijing's new-style reformist institutions may well have been a function of their publicity and ties to the capital's cosmopolitan elite.

Beijing's poor in 1920

With a population of 811,556 the year before our famine, the walled sections of Beijing, divided into the North (Inner) and South (Outer) cities, comprised China's fourth largest urban community, behind the commercial cities of Guangzhou near Hong Kong, Hankou on the Yangzi, and Shanghai. Beyond those residing in the Legation Quarter, which lay just inside the main city wall in the North City, the city's foreign population numbered 1,524 in 1917, over a third of whom were Japanese and roughly a fifth American, the second largest foreign nationality. (This compared to a 1920 Shanghai foreign population of 23,307, half of whom were Japanese and a quarter British, the treaty port's second largest foreign group.) Beijing was also a city of men, who numbered 174 for every 100 women, as Sidney Gamble points out in his well-known social survey of the city taken in 1918-19 and published the year after our famine. In other words, the city was nearly two-thirds male at 63.5 percent of the population. This ratio was largely a function of the draw of students, overwhelmingly male, from across the country to its

universities and the estimated 100,000-125,000 "expectant officials" who were in the city in the early Republic awaiting posts in government.[9]

The year before our famine the police classified 96,850 indigent residents as "poor" or "very poor" within the city's walls, that is, 11.95% of the population of the North and South cities. Of these, two-thirds were put in the second, impoverished category. "A family of five can live in comparative comfort according to the local standard on $100 per year," a researcher, quoted by Gamble, determined at the time. Such a budget would have amounted to an expenditure of 35 to 40 coppers per day on "simple and poor" food for the family, an adequate abode, two suits of clothes each, sufficient fuel to make scavenging for burnables in winter unnecessary, and $5 for such things as "meat on feast days and tea quite often, almost every week, while if there is sickness they can even make a trip to the Temple Fair back in the mountains." Presumably, falling below this threshold of seven coppers per person per day would have qualified as poverty, although Gamble in his survey relates that "no absolute standards [had] been adopted" by authorities; instead, poverty appeared to be a subjective case-by-case classification of need. Regardless, there was but a fine line between "comparative comfort" and destitution in 1920 Beijing, one that increasing numbers of people crossed over in the famine year.[10]

Surprisingly, the density of population of districts in the city did not correlate with rates of poverty; the capital's downtown business district outside Qian gate and skirting the main wall dividing the North and South cities had some of the lowest rates of poverty, at 0-4 percent, yet they were also the densest with upwards of 83,800 people per square mile. (Boston, of similar size at the time, had 15,600 people per square mile). What *did* correlate with poverty in many

[9] Gamble, *Social Survey*, 30, 94, 101, 111. *China Sun*, 20 Nov. 1920.
[10] Gamble, *Social Survey*, 38, 268-70.

districts of Beijing circa 1920 was a higher ratio of female inhabitants. The crowded storefronts and workshops downtown employed male clerks, workers and apprentices and lodged them, often on the workspace floor (while most wives and children remained on farms in the countryside). It was in the residential areas, some with sizable agricultural plots within the walls but in the periphery of downtown, where the population thinned out and women comprised a larger part of the population, and this is also where the poverty rate might reach 15-20 percent (and in one district in the southeast corner of the South City, as high as a third of the population). Women, as we will see, comprised a disproportionately high number of city residents dependent on public and charitable relief. Still, these numbers indicate that poverty was relatively spread out in Republican Beijing, and the city did not possess the concentrations of poverty that one might associate with the industrial city or Victorian slum; the classes in many neighborhoods shared lanes, if not walls.

The incidence of poverty did change dramatically, however, at the city wall, and it was in the four suburbs where the rawest signs of destitution were visible. "The police have forced many beggars to leave the city and are careful about allowing any destitute families to move into the city," Gamble noted in 1919. "The most superficial study of the suburbs outside the gates," an area not surveyed by Gamble's project, "shows that there the destitute constitute a much larger proportion of the population … Just outside the city can be found a great collection of beggars with unsightly sores and deformities, or braving the winter winds with only a bit of sacking for clothing. There will be practically none of these inside the city. And outside the gates the beggars are much more insistent in their demands…"[11] The suburbs, as we will also see, saw a much higher intensity of relief interventions in the lives of the poor over the course of the crisis year.

[11] *Ibid.*, 95, 100, 270-2, 276.

This did not mean, however, that incoming refugees were barred from the city proper over the famine year. While a group of 173 men and women from nearby counties were indeed denied entry into city gates in early September and left to camp outside and roam the surrounding districts, within weeks reports appeared of refugees readily gaining entry, in one case 180 Hejian County men and women "all (*tongtong*)" walking through Zhengyang gate after having arrived by train at the west station.[12] Their appearance coincided with Interior Minister Zhang Zhitan's order to the leadership of the metropolitan administration (*jingzhao yin*), the gendarmerie (*bujun tongling*), and inspector of police (*jingcha zongjian*) to tally refugees and prepare for their accommodation (*anzhi*), an operation broken down and explored throughout this chapter.[13]

Pingtiao

Failed spring harvests brought soaring prices to the capital region as early as mid-summer 1920. Normally, household expenditure on food in the city took up 68 percent (in wealthier homes) to 83 percent (in poorer ones) of family income, making the city's lower classes especially sensitive to grain price shocks. (By contrast, rent was relatively cheap in the capital, taking up merely five to fifteen percent of household income.)[14] Beijing abutted drought-stricken agricultural zones that were suffering, to boot, the aftermath of a disruptive regional war, and well before the word "famine" itself found print late that summer, the capital press was recording a delicate social negotiation around the price of grain, food export policy and the distilling of alcohol. As early as July 8 municipal police were ordering a survey of grain prices in the surrounding region, while on July 20 Cao Rui, the Zhili governor, was weighing a ban on the

[12] *Shihua*, 10 Sept. 1920. *Shihua*, 26 Sept. 1920.
[13] *Shuntian shibao*, 26 Sept. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 28 Sept. 1920.
[14] Gamble, *Social Survey*, 269.

export of grain. County magistrates followed suit, with Laishui County to the west of Beijing forbidding "unscrupulous merchants (*jian shang*)" from taking grain out of the county in late August. By mid-September the metropolitan leadership had ordered regional magistrates to enforce an Interior Ministry ban on the distillation of grain-based spirits in afflicted counties, a traditional measure taken during times of dearth,[15] and soon joined the wider provincial price stabilization effort designed to stimulate the importation of food through tax exemption and discounted or remitted freight transport fees on the condition that it be sold at reduced cost to the general public, normally 10 to 50 percent off prevailing prices.

In 1920 Beijing, the first concerted *pingtiao* effort was strikingly informal, though, launched in mid-July by Feng Gongdu – a member of the city gentry (*shen*) with no apparent official position – in response to supply disruptions caused by the brief July war east of the city. Feng joined with nine other "people with shared resolve (*tongzhi*)" to establish what was generically referred to in the press as the "Zhili Gentry Temporary Grain Discount Bureau," which sold discount grain at four temples around the city for two hours early every morning of the week using an initial capital loan of $50,000 from merchants. By the end of July the operation had expanded to eight locations in the suburbs, totaling fourteen *pingtiao* centers at temples, ancestral halls, and private residences in the metropolitan area, bringing in grain under police escort from the fertile area of Xuanhua and Kalgan northwest of the city by the Great Wall. Later, greater volumes of grain were brought in from the Northeast, including a single October shipment of 35,000 bags (*dai*) of Manchurian wheat flour – roughly 1.5 million *jin*, which would have amounted to a market infusion of roughly a 1½ *jin* of flour per Beijing resident.[16]

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[15] *Xiao gongbao* 8 July 1920. *Da gongbao* 21 July 1920. *Da gongbao* 29 Aug. 1920. *Shuntian shibao* 23 Sept. 1920.
[16] The group, most commonly referred to as the "*Zhi shen pingtiao ju*," raised money from sources ranging from several of the initiators themselves to the Grain Relief Society, an electric light company, the Lingjieshuhua charitable society, a restaurant, a calligraphy exhibition, the Municipal Police Bureau, the Ministry of

Also in response to the food scarcity caused by the brief July war, a collective effort dubbed the Grain Relief Society, or *Liangshi jiuji hui,* was founded in mid-July by three generals, each of whom deserves some attention. Wang Huaiqing (aka Wang Maoyi), a graduate of the Beiyang Military Academy fresh from serving on the winning side of the Zhili-Anhui war that month, was that same week appointed commander of the capital's army *yamen*, variously called the *tishu*, or the capital gendarmerie. Wang's army *yamen*, headquartered on the avenue running south of the city's Bell Tower, was responsible for guarding the city gates, patrolling the region's highways, and policing the area extending an average distance of 20 *li* from the capital walls, including all four suburbs as far as the summer palaces in the northwest where the campuses of Peking and Qinghua universities are today. The majority of the capital's poor, therefore, resided in General Wang's jurisdiction. (Wang, forty-five years old in 1920, was a decorated veteran of the first Sino-Japanese war and a native of Ningjin County in south-central Zhili; later in the year he personally sent a modest shipment of relief sorghum to his home county, as we saw in the last chapter.)[17]

At the time of the founding of the Grain Relief Society in July, Wang Hu, a native of Zhili's Ding County, was a few weeks away from taking the post of administrator of the metropolitan region, or *jingzhao yin*, which he served in for a brief month in August before being appointed governor of Jiangsu Province in September. The *jingzhao* had, after the establishment of the Republic, replaced what had been called Shuntian prefecture under the Qing, a jurisdiction

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Communications, and other individuals. Ministry of Communications records regularly converted "bags (*dai*)" of grain at a rate of fifty "pounds (*bang*)" each. *Xiao gongbao*, 15 July 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 19 July 1920. *Shihua*, 29 July 1920. *Shihua*, 11 Sept. 1920. *Aiguo baihuabao*, 31 Oct. 1920. *Zhengfu gongbao*, 13 June 1921. *Xiao minbao*, 21 Mar. 1921. *Zhenzai ribao*, 28 Nov. 1920.

[17] Xu, *Minguo renwu*, 109-10. Powell, M. C. and H. K. Tong, eds., *Who's Who in China. Second Edition 1920* (Shanghai: Millard's Review. Reprinted in *Who's Who in China. 1918-1950*. Hong Kong: Chinese Materials Center, 1982), 212-13.

of twenty counties encircling the capital whose leadership, as a security measure for the emperor, was answerable directly to the throne, bypassing the Zhili governor.[18]

The grain society's third co-initiator, Jiang Yucheng (aka Jiang Chaozong) was an Anhui Province-native who had worked under the Qing general and first president of the Republic, Yuan Shikai. Earlier in 1920, Jiang was appointed in charge of the capital's yellow banner, an anachronistic military division from the Qing. Banners consisted of members of the fighting units of the Qing army and their dependents who, divided by the color of their battle flags, had been stationed at various key points around the empire since its founding in the mid-seventeenth century. Less than a decade after the fall of the Manchu dynasty, a full quarter of greater Beijing's population of just over one million still consisted of these bannermen and their families,[19] their entitlements and state pensions largely defunct or in arrears, reducing many to idle poverty, the working of odd jobs, ridicule for their fallen status by the wider public, and, as we will see, relying on handouts from charities, some of which specifically served their community. It is unclear what led Jiang to head a division of bannermen, or what the position even entailed nine years after the fall of the Qing, but his earlier military career and his 1920 appointment clearly allied him with the metropolitan area and wider Zhili's ruling Beiyang regime.[20]

Launched on the 20th of July with headquarters downtown at the bannermen garrison offices of General Jiang, who would serve as head of the society and be most commonly associated with its operation, the Grain Relief Society had reportedly already secured $100,000

[18] Wang had been appointed the first civil governor of Hunan in 1914 through the influence of Xiong Xiling, then serving as President Yuan Shikai's premier, although Wang never actually took up the post due to opposition from political rivals. Edward A. McCord, *The Power of the Gun: The Emergence of Modern Chinese Warlordism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 188-89. Xu, *Minguo renwu*, 28.
[19] Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing*, 13, 297.
[20] Gamble, *Social Survey*, 67-70. Xu, *Minguo renwu*, 229.

in "charitable" donations, plus $1,000 from Charles Crane, the American minister to China, and had received tax-exemption and remitted transport fees from the relevant state ministries. Within the week, the operation comprised eight *pingtiao* locations inside the city and received a donation of $20,000 from co-founder Wang Huaiqing. One early report said the operation was for the benefit of impoverished Manchus, although there is no indication that it was designed to sell to members of that community exclusively. Rules printed in newspapers in late August stipulated that grain centers would open their doors for four hours each morning, selling a maximum of three *jin*, or 1.8 kg, of grain to each adult per day (one *jin* to each child) and that for the purposes of maintaining order, men and women would be separated at purchase time. Also in late August, the group expanded its operations to three more locations in west Beijing in light of the drought and locust conditions there, and reached further into the city outskirts in the fall, eventually comprising over twenty discount grain stations across the city and suburbs.[21]

Shipments of grain brought into the metropolitan region by the group appeared to start large and grow exponentially as local fall harvests proved weak or nonexistent and distant regions of the country like Manchuria and the area by the Great Wall reported bumper crops. One of its first deliveries was in early August of 30,000 "bags (*dai*)," or 1,125,000 *jin*, of flour from Fengtian for temporary storage at Beijing's Anhui *huiguan*, a site chosen perhaps because of General Jiang's Anhui origins. Later that month, the group reportedly brought in a shipment of 5,000 *shi*, or 600,000 *jin*, of millet from northern Shanxi and another 2,000 *shi*, or 240,000 *jin*, of rice from south China for *pingtiao* sale. Later, in mid-November, multiple news sources reported an enormous order for 500,000 *shi*, or 60 million *jin*, of millet and 100,000 *shi*, or 12 million *jin*, of wheat from the region around Kalgan up the rail line on the way to Mongolia,

[21] *Xiao gongbao*, 14 July 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 19 July 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 20 July 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 17 Aug. 1920. *Chenbao*, 23 Aug. 1920. *Shihua*, 24 Aug. 1920. *Chenbao*, 29 Aug. 1920. *Zhenzai ribao*, 6 Nov. 1920. *Shihua*, 15 Nov. 1920.

which appeared to exhaust the group's funds – such an order would have cost millions of dollars, and it is unclear how the money was sourced – and prompt calls to end its operations.[22]

Despite public complaints in November from segments of the merchant community that prices had been sufficiently suppressed by *pingtiao* activity, and despite the downward pressure on prices from the expansion of soup kitchen activity in late autumn (to which we will turn later), General Wang Huaiqing reportedly insisted that the *pingtiao* efforts of Feng Gongdu's gentry group and the Grain Relief Society – both of which had run out of money – continue into the winter due to the swelling number of poor in the city. The city's "secondary poor (*cipin*)," who were denied access to soup kitchens where only the "destitute (*jipin*)" were fed, reportedly expressed fears over the imminent closure of *pingtiao* centers that served to stretch the purchasing power of their dwindling cash reserves. Both Wang and Beijing police chief Yin Hongshou petitioned the Interior Ministry for sufficient funds to carry both operations on for "several" more months, and the Government Relief Bureau, or *zhenwu chu*, was ordered to promptly release an unspecified amount of funds for the purpose. There were reports in November of difficulty getting the Bureau to release funds at the time – which is not surprising considering the fiscal situation and competing demands on the state purse – but city authorities were reportedly successful in raising $250,000 from gentry-merchant circles, after which agents were dispatched to northern Shanxi and elsewhere to acquire more grain for what were deemed "merchant-managed and gentry/official assisted *pingtiao* operations." Another 3,000 *shi*, or 360,000 *jin*, of millet was reportedly brought into the city from northern Shanxi in mid-December for *pingtiao* operation by the Grain Relief Society, which, while closing temporarily in January due to empty stocks, was reportedly active again early the next month when it brought

[22] *Zhongguo minbao*, 3 Aug. 1920. *Chenbao*, 29 Aug. 1920. *Chenbao*, 1 Sept. 1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 6 Nov. 1920. *Shangye ribao*, 6 Nov. 1920. *Zhenzai ribao*, 12 Nov. 1920.

in another 1,000 *shi*, or 120,000 *jin*, of millet into the city. The gentry-led *pingtiao* operation of Feng Gongdu closed its doors on the first of February 1921, around the time the Grain Relief Society disappeared from the news pages and presumably shut down as well.[23]

So far, our discussion on grain-discount activity in the capital has focused on the operations that news sources explicitly associated with one of two relief efforts, one credited to capital-area gentry, the other initiated and run by members of the city's military establishment but with cash donations from the public at large. But, General Wang's gendarmerie and other official organs set up their own *pingtiao* operations selling to the general public over the course of the crisis, distinguished in the press as "official grain (*guan mi*)." One such facility operated out of the offices of Wang Hu's metropolitan administration (*jingzhao yin gongshu*), selling "exceptionally large amounts (*feichang duo*)" of grain daily at one point in December.[24] As early as July 23 the municipal police had secured $50,000 and opened *pingtiao* centers at four city locations. Having ordered all twenty counties under the metropolitan jurisdiction to set up *pingtiao* centers in mid-August,[25] the central government reportedly also stationed an agent in Shanghai at the time to manage bulk purchases of grain there expressly for the Beijing public food supply, the first of which consisted of 100,000 *shi*, or 12 million *jin*, of rice for *pingtiao* sale in the capital. By late August, Wang's army *yamen* had set up twelve *pingtiao* centers in the city's suburbs provisioned largely with millet from up the rail line in the region of Kalgan. At times throughout the winter grain selling activity would slow due to grain shortages and pick up

[23] *Shihua*, 15 Nov. 1920. *Chenbao*, 11 Nov. 1920. *Chenbao*, 17 Nov. 1920. *Shuntian shibao*, 14 Oct. 1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 26 Nov. 1920. *Zhenzai ribao*, 28 Nov. 1920. *Shihua*, 5 Dec. 1920. *Chenbao*, 14 Dec. 1920. *Beijing baihua bao*, 28 Jan. 1921. *Xiao minbao*, 21 Mar. 1921.
[24] *Shihua*, 5 Dec. 1920. Other examples include *Xiao gongbao*, 25 Aug. 1920 and *Shihua*, 26 Aug. 1920.
[25] In a previous chapter we have seen to what extent *pingtiao* operations were active in rural Zhili counties through the fall of 1920, so we will confine our discussion here to the city of Beijing and its surrounding districts. It should be mentioned, though, that in one of the metropolitan counties, Fangshan, due west of Beijing, county-run *pingtiao* sales in the autumn of 1920 were reportedly skeletal – amounting to "several dozen *shi*" over two months – and at parity with market prices, actually serving to *raise* local prices. We will turn to other examples of mismanagement and malfeasance in relief operations below. *Xiao gongbao*, 20 Nov. 1920.

again, such as when the *yamen*'s suburban centers brought in 20,000 *bao*, or some 3.2 million *jin*, of millet from the Kalgan region in early February after shutting down temporarily the month before. Sales at the *yamen*'s *pingtiao* centers lasted through the winter, and included 5,000 *shi*, or 600,000 *jin*, of millet from Kalgan in mid-March. Reports on *pingtiao* centers run by Wang's army *yamen* mentioned selling prices with more frequency than those of other agencies, and they ranged from 5 to 6 coppers per *jin* of millet, the most common grain sold at *pingtiao* centers, when the Beijing market price hovered mostly in the area of 7 to 8 coppers per *jin*. The official centers also set a per person daily purchase limit ranging from two to five *jin*, which fluctuated with the numbers of buyers and grain at hand.[26]

Contributions to the capital's food supply were also initiated and funded by communities and provincial governments beyond the region. Further examination of the response to the famine in Hankou, Manchuria and elsewhere in 1920-21 will have to wait for our next chapter. For now, it might be mentioned that 2,000 *shi*, or 240,000 *jin*, of rice and 5,000 *dai*, or 187,500 *jin*, of flour were shipped to Beijing from Jilin Province in late July 1920 as part of an effort to stabilize north China's food supply mobilized by the military governor of the three northeastern provinces, Zhang Zuolin, from among merchant-gentry in Fengtian, Jilin and Heilongjiang provinces. A mid-August news brief reported another 5,000 *shi*, or 600,000 *jin*, of assorted grain "sped" to the capital by Zhang, presumably for *pingtiao* sale, and in early October, Zhang reportedly sent $10,000 for the establishment of a *pingtiao* office in Beijing to handle the increasing contributions from the northeast.[27]

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[26] *Shihua*, 10 Sept. 1920. *Shihua*, 11 Aug. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 19 Aug. 1920. *Shihua*, 28 Aug. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 23 Aug. 1920. *Shihua*, 28 Aug. 1920. *Chenbao*, 27 Oct. 1920. *Chenbao*, 25 Jan. 1921. *Beijing baihua bao*, 2 Feb. 1921. (The Ministry of Communications consistently converted "*bao*" to 160 *jin* in relief reports. *Zhengfu gongbao*, 13 June 1921.) *Shihua*, 10 March 1921. Grain market price per *jin* cited in *Xiao gongbao*, 18 Sept. 1920.
[27] *Shihua*, 28 July 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 19 Aug. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 2 Oct. 1920.

Missing from the discussion so far have been the merchants and grain firms who provisioned the capital in normal years, and who continued to do so throughout the famine of 1920-21. Grain dealers of all sizes responded to tax-exemptions and subsidized transport costs by the state by putting discounted grain into the city's food supply through the fall. (See **Table 2** for a list of such activity gleaned from city news sources.) In mid-July, the Beijing Chamber of Commerce reportedly set up several *pingtiao* centers in each of Beijing's districts, sending agents down to Hankou on the Yangzi for "several ten thousand sacks" of flour in early September for sale in Beijing at a discount of four *jiao* each sack, contributing, reportedly, to a huge drop in the market price of rice flour and a drop in corn flour of 1 copper per *jin*.[28] Later in October, 22 grain firms reportedly mobilized grain for below-market *pingtiao* sale,[29] with one recruiting five other firms to bring in a reported 400 train cars of sorghum, millet and corn for *pingtiao* sale in Beijing and in surrounding districts, while another brought in grain from (presumably northern) Zhili and Henan for sale at 660 cash (or 6.6 coppers) per *jin*, down from a recent market price in Beijing of 780 cash.[30]

News pages also gave glimpses of the existence of smaller, apparently independent efforts to provide discount grain to particular Beijing neighborhoods, such as a "local relief group (*difang jiujihui*)" in the Nanwanzi district inside Dong'an gate whose September *pingtiao* operations moved out of its "cramped" location to a nearby rented storefront.[31] It is difficult, if not pointless, to disentangle these larger, hybrid "public-private" efforts from ones above that appeared to be more purely state-run in management and funding. When, for example, gentry (*shendong*) from a group of ten villages west of the city faced swelling numbers of poor residents

[28] *Shihua* reported a drop of 60 cash per *jin* of rice flour, an enormous drop that cannot be readily verified. *Xiao gongbao*, 20 July 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 22 July 1920. *Shihua*, 6 Sept. 1920.
[29] *Zhongguo minbao*, 3 Oct. 1920.
[30] *Beijing ribao*, 14 Oct. 1920. *Shihua*, 20 Oct. 1920.
[31] *Yishi bao*, 28 Sept. 1920.

in October and petitioned General Wang Huaiqing's army *yamen* for the establishment of a *pingtiao* branch in their district, Wang's offices in turn "mailed a request (*han qing*)" for the creation of such a facility to the Grain Relief Society, in one gesture both confirming the military leadership's close relationship with the group and the fact that it had no direct control over its largely charitably-funded operation.[32]

Table 2: Merchant *pingtiao* activity in greater Beijing, 1920-21

Agent	Volume/origin	Price/sale location	News source & date, 1920-21
Beijing Chamber of Commerce	"several ten thousand bags (*dai*)" of flour from Hankou	Discount of four *jiao* each sack	*Shihua*, Sept 6
Grain merchants Hu Huixing and Zhang Qiwang	300,000 *shi*, or 36 million *jin*, of grain from Kalgan	At shops in northwest Beijing at 720 cash, or 7.2 coppers, per *jin*, when 840 cash was the market price	*Xiao gongbao*, Sept 18
Five grain firms	400 train cars of sorghum, millet and corn	Beijing and surrounding districts	*Beijing ribao*, Oct 14
Unspecified grain firms	"Huge batch (*dapi*)" of Henan and (northern) Zhili grain	Selling in Beijing for 660 cash, or 6.6 coppers, per *jin*, down from a recent market price of 780 cash	*Shihua*, Oct 20
Tonghexing 同和興, a Tianjin County organization	36,000 tons, or 60,480,000 *jin*, of grain from 20 Fengtian counties	Eight counties along the Fengtian-Beijing rail line, including Beijing, and in 6 counties along the Beijing-Hankou line in west Zhili	*Da gongbao*, Oct 30
Three grain firms	4,000 *shi*, or 480,000 *jin*, of grain from Datong in northern Shanxi	Beijing city	*Chenbao*, Nov 19
Merchant Hu Yongtao	50,000 *shi*, or 6 million *jin*, of Jiangsu and Jiangxi rice	Beijing	*Zhongguo minbao*, Nov 15.
Grain firm	2,500 *bao*, or 400,000 *jin*, of grain from storage in Datong	Beijing	*Zhongguo minbao*, Nov 15
Tianjin Chamber of Commerce	140,000 *bao*, or 22.4 million *jin*, of bran	Tianjin and Beijing	*Dagong bao*, Nov 30
Four grain firms	12,000 *shi*, or 1.44 million *jin*, grain from Datong in northern Shanxi	Beijing	*Zhongguo minbao*, Dec 1
Yang Changyi, Wang Shutang and four other capital area merchant-gentry (*shenshang*)	Pooled capital to procure grain in the Northeastern provinces	Afflicted counties of the metropolitan area	*Chenbao*, Feb 3

[32] *Shihua*, 10 Sept. 1920.

With such vast amounts of grain moving over such great distances and cash trading hands in a network of crowded and often disorderly depots and sale centers in 1920-21, there was ample opportunity for drama, disturbances, and abuse. Graft by *pingtiao* staff certainly existed; in one case, "several hundred *jin*" of grain was allegedly sneaked out the door by staff each night for sale on the market; in another, buyers were reportedly short-changed an eighth of each *jin* they bought; in still another, grain sales were inflated with "not a small amount of sand" at two *pingtiao* locations, prompting investigations by Wang Huaiqing and unspecified disciplining of each station manager. (Within the week, the reportedly regular practice by *pingtiao* officials and guards of acquiring grain for home-use was banned by Wang, with unknown success.)[33]

Interestingly, news briefs covering incidents behind the walls of *pingtiao* centers tended to focus on those in which women were involved. The sexes were limited to shopping for grain on alternating days at official *pingtiao* centers starting the 25th of August after a woman was trampled and a young boy robbed at an official center in late August, a policy also enacted by the gentry-run *pingtiao* centers in early September. In light of continued "unusual disorderliness" at grain centers, new rules were set on the 30th that apparently applied to official *pingtiao* centers around the city: tickets had to be bought beforehand (at a limit of 2,000 sold daily), men and women would continue to be separated, and women carrying children were prohibited after incidents of infants crushed to death by the crowds. In late summer, newspapers urged authorities to look into reports that grain shops had started hiring poor women to acquire grain at *pingtiao* centers run by the Grain Relief Society for sale on the market ("on any given day" in one location inside Guang'an gate "many of the female buyers" were reportedly hires of "unscrupulous merchants.") At certain sites, the rush of buyers led to temporary purchase limits of one *jin* a

[33] *Shihua*, 18 Sept. 1920. *Chenbao*, 4 Oct. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 21 Dec. 1920. *Xiao minbao*, 13 Jan. 1921. *Shihua*, 18 Jan. 1921. *Xiao minbao*, 23 Jan. 1921.

person. The stress of the crowd reportedly induced childbirths by two women at *pingtiao* centers across town within days of each other (they were sent home and police managed their grain purchases); amid the push of 5,000 women at another center, a woman who had reportedly gone hungry for days fumbled and lost the two strings of ten coppers she had borrowed from a neighbor, after which a passing soldier handed 15 coppers to the "uncontrollably weeping" woman – enough to buy three *jin* of millet – and bought her an additional *jin* at five coppers, after which she kowtowed in thanks and left. Such instances of kindness mixed with cruelty as other *pingtiao* patrons were whipped to the ground by soldiers and, in one case, doused with cold water in the December cold as a means of crowd control, prompting an "enraged" General Wang Huaiqing to order an investigation and punishment of his men.[34]

But if *pingtiao* managers often presided over chaos, maintaining order was not the only motivation when center rules were redrawn: all three major *pingtiao* efforts pushed their opening hours into the mid-day expressly so "the poor would not freeze" when lining up for purchase – the gentry operations in October, the municipal centers the next month, the Grain Relief Society in January – a concern that grew with the challenge of meeting the rising caloric and clothing needs of the city's poor as Beijing's winter chill set in.[35] Worse, the fluctuating value of copper over the year – the currency of the poor, used to buy daily necessities such as food – meant the poor faced more than short food supplies in the struggle to feed their families. "The poor will again eat the depreciation of copper coins," ran one September headline. "Unscrupulous merchants" had reportedly brought in a "massive amount of coppers" from outside the province, bringing in an "explosion" in copper supply that threatened to wipe out the advantages brought by the *pingtiao*

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[34] *Xiao gongbao*, 25 Aug. 1920. *Shihua*, 26 Aug. 1920. *Beijing ribao*, 7 Sept. 1920. *Shihua*, 30 Aug. 1920. *Shihua*, 1 Oct. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 2 Sept. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 8 Sept. 1920. *Yishi bao*, 12 Sept. 1920. *Chenbao*, 20 Dec. 1920. *Chenbao*, 13 Oct. 1920. *Chenbao*, 28 Nov. 1920. *Shihua*, 21 Sept. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 11 Jan. 1921. *Guobao*, 14 Jan. 1921.
[35] *Chenbao*, 13 Oct. 1920. *Chenbao*, 28 Nov. 1920. *Guobao*, 14 Jan. 1921.

operations.[36] With the arrival of winter and the confirmed failure of any autumn harvest in many surrounding districts, free relief superseded *pingtiao* as the focus of relief efforts. Free food in the form of *zhouchang* – congee stations or "soup kitchens" – is the relief method we will turn to next.

Describing the operations of Beijing charities in the late Qing, Susan Naquin correctly describes them as having "an intimate and complicated relationship with the state better captured by Bryna Goodman's 'partial autonomy, interpenetration, and negotiation' than any tidy division between 'public' and 'private.'"[37] This appears to hold true for the early years of the Republic. When *pingtiao* operations sprang up in July and August 1920 from the ranks of gentry and merchants acting as firms or individually, and from local police and municipal officials and others sending in grain from other provinces, they did not suggest a top-down state operation, nor a dual operation of state and "civil" actors acting independently from those in power. Instead, we see *pingtiao* efforts arising from a shared set of concerns that transcended state or civil domains to a common cultural value system valuing social stability and paternalistic poor relief. These operations were facilitated by the resources of the state but did not wholly rely on them. To these actors, whether price-stabilization measures were in the hands of state actors, gentry or merchants mattered less, it appears, than that that they got done. Looking beyond the realms of state and civil spheres is something we should continue to do as we turn to the administering of free relief in the capital and its suburbs.

Soup kitchens

Each winter in "normal" years leading up to 1920, municipal authorities – in the form of the army *yamen*, police, and metropolitan administration – opened a total of seventeen

[36] *Shihua*, 6 Sept. 1920.
[37] Naquin, *Peking*, 651.

zhouchang, or soup kitchens, in greater Beijing for the benefit of the poor in the city and those coming to eat from adjacent counties, an operation that distributed 10,000 items of clothing to the threadbare over the course of each winter.[38] (Sidney Gamble put the figure at twelve centers feeding 700-3,000 people each – seven by the police, three by the *yamen*, and two by the metropolitan administration – but this number appears to have included only facilities in the immediate environs of the city.)[39] In light of the unusual levels of distress in the fall of 1920, Wang Huaiqing, the gendarmerie commander, Yin Hongshou, the police chief, and Wang Hu, the administrator for the metropolitan region, convened in late September and formed a plan to move up the dates of soup kitchen operation and add twelve feeding facilities in the outskirts of the city starting in mid-October for a total of 29 soup kitchens (30 in other reports), a meeting that also moved ahead the distribution of "several tens of thousands" of winter clothes.[40] The Interior Ministry, which presided over the municipal police bureau, put the price tag of such an operation at $300,000, many times more than the average total of $20,500 spent by city authorities on soup kitchens in normal years, according to Gamble: $12,000-15,000 a year by the police, $4,000-$5,000 by the army *yamen*, and $2,500 by the metropolitan authority.[41]

The same day in September, President Xu Shichang ordered the Interior Ministry to release $10,000 for the operation to get off the ground, which joined $5,000 donated that week to the Ministry for soup kitchen operations by two former Qing palace women described in the press as former imperial concubines. Within days, metropolitan administrator Wang Hu had reportedly secured funds to begin the opening of soup kitchens in sixty locations in the region for a planned six months, and had sent agents beyond the city to procure grain. (It might be pointed

[38] *Chenbao*, 24 Sept. 1920.
[39] Gamble, *Social Survey*, 277.
[40] *Chenbao*, 24 Sept. 1920.
[41] Gamble, *Social Survey*, 279.

out that the suburban locales for official soup kitchens in 1920 included what Lillian Li describes as the "usual locations" for such facilities as far back as the 1820s: Huangcun, due south of Beijing in today's Daxing district, for example, and Lugou Bridge, also south of the city.) The plan was to raise $500,000 for the operation, and for both fundraising purposes and oversight of the overall operation, a Soup Kitchen Provisioning Bureau, or *zhouchang choubei chu*, was established in mid-October with offices at a spacious Xu family residence on a Beichizi district *hutong* staffed with members of the military, police, and gentry and headed by one Liu Jingyi.[42]

The dire fiscal state of the Beiyang government – the details and politics of which will be dealt with in a later chapter – meant that state organs were financed largely in a spontaneous hand-to-mouth fashion, and the municipal soup kitchen system was no exception, raising money from a motley set of sources. On October 15, Liang Shiyi's North China Relief Society provided General Wang Huaiqing's army *yamen* with $100,000 for its soup kitchen operations, money the group had raised in part from holding fundraising events in the capital's Central Park, just south of the Forbidden City, over the mid-autumn festival. Another apparent source was leftover monies from the vast province-wide relief effort during and after the floods of 1917, which one report put at $3 million still sitting in a Tianjin bank as of summer 1920. (Of $18 million originally raised, $12 million had been spent and, the report notes, $3 million had since "vanished.")[43] In late October 1920, municipal authorities reportedly ordered that an unspecified sum of this leftover flood fund be released to the Soup Kitchen Provisioning Bureau, although it is unclear if the order was carried out. Money also came from the lower ranks of the military, both charitably and exacted through disciplinary measures: an army patrol commander,

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[42] *Xiao gongbao*, 21 Sept. 1920. *Chenbao*, 24 Sept. 1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 24 Sept. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 26 Sept. 1920. *Shihua*, 26 Sept. 1920. *Yishi bao*, 26 Sept. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 4 Oct. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 8 Oct. 1920. *Shuntian shibao*, 13 Oct. 1920. *Aiguo baihua bao*, 6 Feb. 1921. Li, *Fighting Famine*, 159. *Zhengfu gongbao*, 13 June 1921.

[43] *Zhongguo minbao*, 4 Aug. 1920.

representing the "full body of officers and soldiers" under the *yamen*, presented General Wang Huaiqing with an offer to each donate 10 coppers out of their monthly pay to cover soup kitchen expenses from their establishment in October to their day of closing, projected then to be in late winter 1921; a month later, half of the November pay of a garrison officer was docked by Wang and sent to cover soup kitchen expenses after the officer had failed to follow Wang's personal directive to provision a group of 30 refugees passing through the city with food and drink on their way northward to Zhangjiakou (Kalgan) by the Great Wall.[44]

Commerce was another source of money, either voluntarily or through special taxes. At times, managers of city grain shops donated grain to *yamen*-run soup kitchens, such as 3,000 *jin* of millet in one mid-October case. In early November, the capital police announced a $2 monthly surcharge on motorcars in the city to cover soup kitchen expenses – which could have fetched a substantial amount since car imports to China had risen 65 percent in value in the previous year alone to 3.569 million taels.[45] Afterwards, monthly fees of $1 to $3 were collected by the police from teahouses and other entertainment spots in the city. So were the courts sources of money: in December, Beijing's court of law started selling off a backlog of stolen items unclaimed by their rightful owners to raise money for the reception of refugees, a policy adopted later in January 1921 by the *yamen* and police leadership when seeking funds to extend by a month the operation of soup kitchens. Finally, grain was raised from penalties placed on those trying to abuse the free relief system: reports in November that attendees of suburban soup kitchens were "frequently"

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[44] The Interior Ministry reported problems maintaining fundraising for the metropolitan soup kitchen operation in correspondence with the army *yamen* in January 1921, the moment the fate of $120,000 in city defense funds was being decided. The funds had gone unspent after being raised by the capital's business community the previous summer in case of disruptions or attack during the brief July war, after which they were kept by the *yamen* and Beijing police bureau. After a week of discussion in January over its use for soup kitchen and shelters, the sum was devoted instead to pay the salaries of municipal police and soldiers, each of whom were reportedly to receive $6 on the first of February. *Xiao minbao*, 19 Jan. 1921. *Shihua*, 21 Jan. 1921. *Xiao gongbao*, 21 Jan. 1921. *Xiao gongbao*, 30 Jan. 1921.

[45] Robert McElroy, "Aims and Organization of the China Society of America," *China Society Pamphlets No. 1* (New York: The China Society of America, Inc., 1923), 7.

bringing back gruel to feed livestock were met with announcements of fines of between 5 and 20 *shi* of millet for those caught doing so, a threat that authorities reportedly made good on: within the week *yamen* investigators arrested a villager west of Beijing for feeding his dog with portions from a local soup kitchen and the man was promptly fined 15 *shi* of millet by General Wang.[46]

Grain was brought into the city for police and *yamen*-run soup kitchens as early as September when a shipment of 5,000 *bao*, or 800,000 *jin*, of Henan rice arrived. In the last week of October, seven municipal soup kitchens were reportedly up and running in temples, mosques, a teahouse, an artillery factory, and other facilities in the city, plus thirty-seven in the Beijing's suburbs, and authorities would add facilities in the following weeks as refugee numbers rose. Each facility received refugees and members of "destitute (*jipin*)" households who had received colored entry cards from door-to-door canvassers, and ticket-holders could bring in two children along with them. Reports warned of "heavy punishments" for any "wealthy" residents who attempted to feed at the facilities, and incidents followed of the arrest and booking by the *yamen* of some trying to do so. This exclusion of comparatively well-to-do residents from free food relief in 1920-21 contrasts with Gamble's observation that at official soup kitchens in 1918-19 "No questions [we]re asked of those who receive the food, the fact that they apply being taken as sufficient evidence of their need. " It is possible that in light of the famine in 1920 admission rules changed at municipal feeding stations, excluding, for example, those who could take advantage of subsidized grain at *pingtiao* centers.[47]

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[46] *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 16 Jan. 1921. *Shuntian shibao*, 23 Sept. 1920. *Shihua*, 15 Oct. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 29 Oct. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 3 Nov. 1920. *Shihua*, 7 Nov. 1920. *Shihua*, 11 Nov. 1920. *Aiguo baihua bao*, 17 Oct. 1920. *Chenbao*, 2 Feb. 1921. *Xiao gongbao*, 10 Dec. 1920. *Beijing baihua bao*, 17 Jan. 1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 9 Nov. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 9 Nov. 1920.

[47] *Shihua*, 1 Oct. 1920. *Shihua*, 24 Oct. 1920. *Chenbao*, 29 Oct. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 1 Nov. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 14 Nov. 1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 29 Nov. 1920. Gamble, *Social Survey*, 38, 277.

The soup kitchen operations in Beijing's metropolitan area initiated and run by municipal authorities, with gentry assistance, appear to have far outnumbered those run by relief societies or other groups in and around the capital; and even these extragovernmental efforts appear to have kept close ties with the municipal operations. Gamble made a similar observation in 1919, explaining that "Free food is also distributed from a few centers that are still privately managed, but they are small and at the most case for a few hundred persons. It has been impossible even to make a complete list of them and no attempt has been made to gather any detailed information concerning them."[48] Still, 1920 being a famine year, private efforts appeared to have stepped up their services beyond feeding "a few hundred persons." A mosque outside Chaoyang gate reportedly raised money for a soup kitchen on its grounds every year during the winter months; in mid-October 1920, three gentry from the Muslim Hui community convened over tea there with the plan of opening the facility earlier in light of the crisis, while also adding "warming sheds (*nuan peng*)" for refugees and the local homeless. The facility was apparently open to the wider public beyond the Muslim Hui community. (Other smaller soup kitchen facilities in 1920-21 were reportedly opened expressly for poor members of the region's Muslim community, which numbered some 25,000 in Beijing in 1919, or 3% of the population. This phenomenon stretched back to the troubled 1870s when, as Susan Naquin relates, "two soup kitchens were run by Muslims" in the city "for the members of their community and, like others, supplied with grain by officials after 1878.") The mosque kitchen outside Chaoyang gate apparently received grain supplies from the army *yamen*, which in turn sent inspectors to the facility over the course of the crisis. The military officials also sent some of the poor that fell into the hands of authorities there. One woman pulled from a freezing river by two patrolling soldiers in December – she told the district garrison's head officer that she had decided to kill herself after

[48] Gamble, *Social Survey*, 277.

not having received the bannerman pension she relied on to survive – was referred to a local mosque soup kitchen with a daily entry card entitling her to double portions.[49]

In mid-December, the famine charity of well-known philanthropist Xiong Xiling, the Beiwusheng relief society, established a soup kitchen and a shelter of its own on the grounds of a shuttered glass factory in the South City outside Xuanwu gate, sending out canvassers to all parts of the city to hand out entry cards to refugees and the poor. (Built with an investment of one million dollars and soon derelict, the glass factory stood as a "warning to those who would introduce modern methods and modern machinery in China without first training men to operate and care for the machines," Gamble explained in 1919 after the machinery in the complex had broken down and the complex closed. Converting the modern complex into a refuge for countrymen fleeing famine doubtless struck a mighty blow to the morale of some in the capital community.)[50] Gentry in the district of Fengtai south of Beijing set up what was reportedly an independent soup kitchen facility there in December, when they dispatched their own agents to Manchuria to procure 15,000 *jin* of millet. When in February a man described as a "merchant-gentry" figure from the village of Sanjiadian west of Beijing sought to assist the swelling number of poor there, he reportedly requested a shipment of 120 *shi* of grain from a major charity in the capital, the *Wushanshe* founded by General Jiang Yucheng (and examined below), with the intention of opening two soup kitchen facilities in the village cooking up a *shi* of grain per day until the spring harvest. In May 1921, the donor list for a soup kitchen established by gentry in the village of Nanpingshan in the southern outskirts of the capital made it into the Beijing magazine *Minsheng yuekan*, although the total monies listed are very modest: six fundraisers were credited with soliciting donations of silver dollars and coppers from 125 people for a total

[49] *Shihua*, 19 Oct. 1920. *Minyi ribao*, 26 Oct. 1920. *Shihua*, 13 Nov. 1920. *Shihua*, 23 Nov. 1920. *Shihua*, 2 Dec. 1920. Naquin, *Peking*, 665. Gamble, *Social Survey*, 98.
[50] Gamble, *Social Survey*, 219.

of $132, which was enough to finance the feeding of eighty people through the winter at 1,250 calories a day. (The source does not say whether the facility increased its porridge output with grain contributions from other sources, though, including the official operations running in the area.) Finally, examples of household-level soup kitchen activity in Beijing appeared in the press, albeit rarely. Zhang Shiyu, a native of Zhili's Wuqing County north of Tianjin who had stepped down as deputy head of the army in 1919, reportedly acquired 1,600 *jin* of rice early in January 1921 to dispense as porridge in the alley beside his residence in west Beijing, a service he apparently provided to the area poor each winter.[51]

Daily attendance at municipal soup kitchens and those run by major charities ranged anywhere from 1,000 to 7,000, with some attracting the hungry from 20 *li* away. "One and all are carrying bowls, buckets, tin cans, baskets, anything that will hold a dipperful of hot porridge," Gamble wrote of such facilities in 1918-19. "As they crowd through the gate, each one is handed a small piece of bamboo which takes the place of an admission ticket and later must be presented to the man who is dishing out the food…" Per instructions from police, a bell was tolled from each facility at feeding time starting in November 1920 to cut down on late arrivals who missed feeding altogether. "First come the children, then the women, and finally the men," Gamble continued. "No one is allowed to eat his porridge in the courtyard; so those in charge see to it that every one leaves as soon as he is served."[52] The first aspect of soup kitchen protocol described here by Gamble, that women be fed before men, is consistent with descriptions, when given, of soup kitchen operations in rural Zhili going back to the early 1800s (a striking difference from the apparent traditional practice within households that men, and even hired

[51] *Chenbao*, 23 Dec. 1920. *Chenbao*, 20 Jan. 1921. *Fengsheng*, 15 Feb. 1921. *Minsheng yuekan*, 10 May 1921. *Chenbao*, 6 Jan. 1921. Xu, *Minguo renwu*, 1761.
[52] *Xiao gongbao*, 4 Nov. 1920. Gamble, *Social Survey*, 276-7.

labor, eat before women, leading to malnutrition among females).[53] The requirement described by Gamble that attendees depart the facility to consume their food, however, apparently did not apply at official soup kitchens in 1920 Beijing: starting in mid-October, special eating sheds (*jiushisuo*) were reportedly assembled from straw mats at "each" soup kitchen in the metropolitan area, by order of police chief Yin Hongshou and General Wang Huaiqing, so that the poor could eat "without being subjected to the freezing cold outside."[54] As for the actual experience of using such facilities, this is exceedingly hard to source. For a glimpse we might turn to Ida Pruitt's classic biography, *A Daughter of Han*, based on extended conversations with a once-destitute woman living in 1890s Penglai, a coastal city in Shandong across the Bo Hai sea from Tianjin: "For another year we lived, begging and eating gruel from the public kitchen," the woman explained in interviews with Pruitt in 1930s Beijing, explaining that her husband had then just sold off their daughter. "At noon the beggars come to the gruel kitchen where all the other beggars have gathered, and find human companionship. There is warm food, pleasantry, and the close feel of people around. There is no future but there is no worry…. All this if a beggar is not sick."[55]

One report put the number of poor fed and housed at 27 city and suburban soup kitchens and 14 city shelters at 65,000 by the end of December 1920. This is roughly five percent of the city and suburban populations and more than double the average of 20,000 and 30,000 people fed per month by city-run soup kitchens in the winters of 1918 and 1925, respectively, according

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[53] The modern gazetteer of central Hebei (Zhili)'s Wuqiang describes the soup kitchen run out of the county granary in the 1820s as such: the granary–initially provisioned in years of good harvest by levies (*zheng*) on local farming households according to three tiers of ability and later by surcharges on rents and land ownership–normally doled out half a liter (or 5 *he*) worth of grain daily per adult (half this to children) for a total of 200 people, with "women fed before men (*xian nü, hou nian*)." This amounted to a *jin* of grain or roughly 2,250 calories. *Wuqiang XZ* 1996 410.

[54] *Shihua*, 13 Oct. 1920.

[55] Ida Pruitt, from a story told to her by Ning Lao T'ai-tai, *A Daughter of Han: the Autobiography of a Chinese Working Woman*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), 71, 73.

to sources cited by Lillian Li.[56] In normal years, official soup kitchens issued exceedingly small rations to attendees, and "most of them use[d] it simply to supplement what other food they can secure," Gamble explained. One September 1920 news article in the small city paper *Xiao gongbao* described the cooking process at police-run facilities in previous years as such: each location would boil two *shi* of grain (each *shi* was measured at 150 *jin*) into 1,755 *jin* of porridge, with each one-*jin* portion of porridge containing a mere 2.73 *liang* of grain, or roughly 380 calories, a figure the article lamented and called for vigilance by philanthropists (*da cishan jia*) this year to better meet the needs of the swelling numbers of destitute. News briefs appearing throughout the fall relate that, at least for the first two months of the crisis, official soup kitchens across the city served similarly minimal portions ranging from 350-400 calories per daily meal.[57]

In mid-November, Interior Minister Zhang Yuanbo ordered soup kitchens and refugee shelters in the city to increase porridge portions to 10 *liang* (five-eighths of a *jin*, or roughly 1,400 calories) for each adult and teenager, and 6 *liang* (or three-eighths of a *jin*, or roughly 850 calories) for children under the age of ten, dispatching inspectors to each station to see that the change was carried out. This new ration, it should be pointed out, almost exactly corresponded to the 1,350 calorie "adult famine ration standard" used under the Qing, according to Lillian Li.[58]

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[56] *Shangye ribao*, 6 Nov. 1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 28 Dec. 1920. Li, *Fighting Famine*, 160. Gamble reports a total of 595,796 meals served in January of 1919 by twelve city facilities, or 19,219 people over 31 days. Gamble, *Social Survey*, 487.

[57] For 1918-19, Gamble cites a similar average city soup kitchen ration of 3½ to 4 ounces of grain consisting of "seven parts millet and three parts rice." Gamble, *Social Survey*, 278. *Xiao gongbao*, 21 Sept. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 29 Oct. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 3 Nov. 1920. *Baihua guoqiang bao*, 2 Nov. 1920. *Shuntian shibao*, 6 Nov. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 7 Nov. 1920. For comparative purposes it might be pointed out that Jean Drèze has found a similar range of calories, 300-500 per person a day, served at village relief kitchens in drought-affected areas of the Bihar region of India in 1967, which were reportedly meant only to supplement 25-30% of the diet of poor children and mothers. Jean Drèze, "Famine Prevention in India," in Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, ed., *The Political Economy of Hunger*, Vol. 2 Famine Prevention (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 56.

[58] Li records an "adult famine ration standard of .005 *shi* of husked grain per person per day" for the Qing period, which, at 120 *jin* per *shi* and 2,250 calories per *jin*, calculates to 1,350 calories per ration. Pierre-Étienne Will similarly states that under the Qing "the typical ration of one-half *sheng* per day would represent… 420 grams of bleached rice, just barely a survival ration, for at about 3,300 kilocalories per kilogram, 420 grams provides less than 1,400 kilocalories." Li, *Fighting Famine*, 159. Will, *Bureaucracy and Famine*, 132.

The Soup Kitchen Provision Bureau brought in a total of 2,636,600 *jin* of assorted grain into the metropolitan region the following month of December, according to railway records, enough to feed roughly 136,700 adults for the month at the above adult ration of 1,400 calories, or an average of 2,278 adults at each of the official sixty soup kitchens in the metropolitan region.

Women and children, however, far outnumbered adult men in Beijing soup kitchen facilities, at least at the ones for which we have attendees broken down by sex and age in 1920-21. This would mean considerably more numbers of people could have been fed at this December rate of grain delivery if children's rations are factored in. (An army *yamen* official inspecting an operation at a mosque outside Chaoyang gate in the city's east in November tallied a total of 1,708 fed there on a day in mid-November – 963 women, 376 men and 469 children. A tally made in early December at a soup kitchen run by district police at a tea facility outside Anding gate in the city's north found local poor numbering 170 men, 1,380 women, 390 boys, and 720 girls, plus a number of refugees for a total of 2,815.)[59] This adult gender ratio was consistent with the attendance at the seven police-run facilities in the previous years where children had comprised 40-45 percent, women 43-46 percent, and men 11-18 percent of attendees. As mentioned earlier, Republican Beijing was a predominantly male city, and many of the men drawn to the nation's capital were university students, officials-in-waiting, or clerks, which were all almost exclusively male-dominated positions unassociated with dire poverty; females in the city, on the other hand, were largely from bannermen families and were thus disproportionately poor, comprising 44.4 percent of those classified "poor" or "very poor" in the city, when females were only 36.5 percent of the city population.[60] The disproportionate use by women of soup kitchens and subsidized *pingtiao* centers in Beijing would make numerical sense.

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[59] *Xiao gongbao*, 19 Nov. 1920. *Aiguo baihua bao*, 19 Nov. 1920. *Zhengfu gongbao*, 13 June 1921. *Minyi ribao*, 13 Nov. 1920. *Yishi bao*, 7 Dec. 1920.
[60] Gamble, *Social Survey*, 270, 278.

Exploration of possible ideologies behind such a skewed gender and age ratio – a paternalistic care for the most vulnerable, a reluctance to reward able-bodied males with free food, or both – will have to wait for a later chapter.

Shelter, temple & street-corner handouts

Soup kitchens, as well as refugee shelters, which will be examined later, were also the locations for handouts of clothing and cash from authorities, and news briefs reported forays into the suburbs by members of the city leadership to accompany such distributions. On one of these occasions in mid-September, General Wang Huaiqing drove by car through Beijing's Xizhi gate to visit the refugee shelter in west Beijing's Five Willow village with the purpose of "consoling (*anwei*)" its 380 lodgers from the famine field, handing fifty coppers to each (enough for ten *jin* of grain at *pingtiao* centers) and an additional 100 *shi* of rice to split between them for a total of 50 *jin* of grain each. Each resident then received roughly 75 days' worth of food at 1,500 calories a day.[61] It is unclear how often Wang made such gestures.

Later in the fall as the cold set in, members of the public appeared at soup kitchens with provisions and cash handouts. One morning in November a man arrived at the Seventh Alley soup kitchen outside Chaoyang gate with two servants, each carrying a sack of 200 Beijing *diao* (each a string of 10 coppers), handing out 4,000 coppers to attendees at 3 coppers each. One afternoon a week later, a man who did not reveal his name to reporters walked into the official-run refugee shelter at a temple of Guanyin, the goddess of mercy, in Haichao district by Fucheng gate and handed out ten coppers to each of its "several hundred" residents. A week later, an army officer named Zhang Xiguang went with an unspecified amount of coppers to the refugee shelter outside Beijing's Fucheng gate to hand out 3, 4, or 5 coppers to each, an act apparently of his

[61] *Xiao gongbao*, 20 Sept. 1920.

own volition. Then in mid-November, the students at the city's No. 7 elementary school on a *hutong* inside Xuanwu gate reportedly started appearing at nearby refugee shelters and soup kitchens on the weekends, handing the 5 coppers they saved that week from economizing on their lunch money, part of a "relief group (*zaimin jiuji hui*)" they initiated at their school. Acts like these appeared to continue through the winter, such as in January, when a Buddhist nun appeared at a soup kitchen on a *hutong* outside Chaoyang gate with 4,000 coppers, handing out 1 copper to each attendee (roughly enough for a steamed bun or a night's stay at a charity lodging house).[62]

In addition to shelters and soup kitchens, city temples also served as points of bulk donations to the poor. At noon one day in early December, a man, his name unknown, walked into the Temple of the Eastern Peak outside Chaoyang gate in east Beijing with two servants and for three hours, accompanied by district garrison soldiers, handed out tickets redeemable for three *jin* of corn meal to the poor gathered there; when he had run out, he then handed tickets redeemable for ten coppers each, or 20 coppers to those found to be extremely poor (*jipin*), for a total of 600 *jin* of flour and 4,000 coppers. (Another news source had an unnamed man arrive at the same temple the same day on a city tram, handing out 3,000 *jin*-worth of grain tickets, plus coppers, before handing "several hundred" sets of clothes to the *yamen* for distribution to the poor. It is unclear if the reports are different versions of the same event.) A week later, an official named Harding from the British Embassy renting a room at the Temple of Compassionate Wisdom, or Cihuisi, outside Fucheng gate, apparently to "serve as a villa" for rest on the weekends, observed the many poor in the area and purchased 10,000 *jin* at a local grain shop, giving out 2,000 portions of 5 *jin* each to the poor. One afternoon at the end of the month, a

[62] *Shihua*, 16 Nov. 1920. *Aiguo baihua bao*, 22 Nov. 1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 29 Nov, 1920. *Chenbao*, 20 Nov. 1920. *Beijing baihua bao*, 12 Jan. 1920.

woman identified as the daughter of Lu Runsheng, the director of the Beijing Mint, walked into the same temple outside Chaoyang gate, also with a servant and an escort of soldiers, and for three hours distributed corn meal tickets and/or coppers for three hours to over 13,000 people; each person received three *jin* of flour, or 2-10 coppers; the scene was apparently so disorderly that a woman in the crowd had a miscarriage and an older woman was trampled.[63]

This combination of disorder and foreigners at temples prompted city authorities to intervene when crowds swelled even further at the Lunar New Year, and apparently disrupted temple fairs and begged from "Westerners (*xiren*)" in particular, "obstructing their view of the festivities." In late February, General Wang Huaiqing ordered that during temple fairs around the city, soldiers were to have beggars present themselves to the district garrison and register; after the closing of a fair, the *yamen* would reward compliant beggars at three tiers: 20 *diao*, or 200 coppers, for the destitute (*jipin*) of young and old age; the young and old of secondary poor (*cipin*) status would receive 100 coppers; and the ordinary poor (*putong pinmin*) would get 50 coppers. Five hundred beggars had apparently signed up by the time of the news report, with the money apparently raised by Wang himself especially for the purpose.[64]

Street corners were also sites of bulk handouts of relief by individuals over the course of the winter. In mid-November, a man identified as Xu Yunheng was seen by a reporter in the area of Anding gate handing out tickets to the poor there each for 3 or 5 *jin* of flour and 10 or 20 *jin* of coal. The reported total was between 400 and 500 tickets. One morning a month later, an older man was spotted by reporters handing out corn meal tickets and coppers outside Xizhi gate, refusing to give his name or home address to reporters before heading to Fucheng and Xibian gates to do the same. During the afternoon one day in mid-February, a woman surnamed Feng

[63] *Aiguo baihua bao*, 6 Dec. 1920. *Chenbao*, 7 Dec. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 18 Dec. 1920. *Chenbao*, 27 Dec. 1920.
[64] *Shihua*, 27 Feb. 1921. *Xiao minbao*, 1 March 1921.

and described as a resident of another Beijing district, inside Di'an gate, pulled up to the main street running through Xizhi gate with 230 *diao*, or strings of coppers, handing out four to six coppers each to the poor there for a total of 2,300 coins – enough for roughly 460 people to buy a *jin* of grain at *pingtiao* centers.[65]

Official door-to-door relief

The above apparently random acts of alms giving at shelters and on street corners were hit-or-miss in their reach to the city's needy. But, just as they had done when determining entry to soup kitchens, city authorities also displayed a systematic approach to allocating state assistance directly to households in the region with deliveries of grain and other relief goods to neighborhoods both downtown and in all four suburbs. In mid-October, Police Chief Yin Hongshou ordered all precincts to send out officers to look into the numbers and needs of poor households in advance of planned distributions of corn meal tickets and clothes. And fearing fraud in the citywide effort, police reportedly sent in inspectors to each district several weeks later in November to confirm the findings made by investigators.[66]

With weather turning colder a month later, General Wang Huaiqing dispatched his own canvassing teams of garrison officers and neighborhood gentry to Beijing's eastern suburbs to identify struggling families there and categorize them into destitute (*jipin*) and secondary poor (*cipin*) conditions. In early December, the Interior Ministry ordered the police leadership to relay instructions to all precincts in the city to again canvass and collect "details" on the needs of local poor households, an order that appeared to have been carried through: a news report a few days afterward lamented that a collection of 300 households in a suburban district had apparently been

[65] *Aiguo baihua bao*, 20 Nov.1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 30 Nov. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 18 Jan. 1921. *Beijing baihua bao*, 17 Feb. 1921.
[66] *Zhongguo minbao*, 14 Oct. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 9 Nov. 1920.

overlooked in the census effort, suggesting, at least, that other locales had indeed been canvassed.[67]

The actual distribution of free grain by authorities to the doors of households had started, however, as early as mid-August when soldiers under General Wang reportedly "seized (*cha huo*)" 3,000 *bao* of "military rice (*jun liang dami*)" – some 480,000 *jin* – from grain firms in the environs of the west Beijing's train station with plans to distribute the lot to poor households in the city's four suburbs. It is unclear if this amount in fact found its way to the hands of the poor, but a report the next day related that 300 *dai* of rice and 600 *dai* of millet – a total of over 33,7500 *jin* of grain – had been dispatched by the *yamen* to the officer in charge of each of the 16 to 20 gendarmerie districts in the city.[68] Each officer was instructed to canvass the poor and give 5 *jin* of grain to each person in an operation lasting five days, during which a named inspector would monitor the operation. In early September, General Wang had reportedly dispatched agents to southern China to acquire an additional bulk purchase of rice that would be split into 3,000 *jin* for each district garrison, where officers were instructed to allocate two or three *jin* to each member of needy households after a canvassing operation. (It might be mentioned that Wang was at the same time facing competing demands to feed the vast numbers of reportedly irregularly-paid soldiers under his command, bringing in 10,700 *bao* of rice from China's south in mid-October – or 1,712,000 *jin* – to issue to his troops: 27 *jin* 4 *liang* for officers, 18 *jin* 6 *liang* for soldiers. Later on, frustration with the continued failure of Cao Kun, Zhili military governor and president of the Republic from 1923-24 – a position he won by "buying" the required parliamentary votes[69] – to meet payroll for his men or supply them on the battlefield

[67] *Minyi ribao*, 14 Nov. 1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 3 Dec. 1920. *Shihua*, 6 Dec. 1920.
[68] The city's military guard, or gendarmerie, was divided into four departments, each of which was sub-divided into four or five districts. Gamble, *Social Survey*, 70.
[69] Nathan, *Peking Politics*, 211-19.

would be a major factor in Wang's temporary resignation from his post in 1923. It also appears to have contributed to Wang's later abandonment of Cao in General Feng Yuxiang's 1924 coup, which, allied with Zhang Zuolin, opened the way for Sun Yat-sen to come to Beijing in a revival of his national appeal–only for the Nationalist leader to die months later of cancer.)[70]

Free grain distribution to households continued even after the mid-autumn opening of the sixty official soup kitchens in and around the city. Police in two Beijing districts were reportedly handing out "several thousand" corn meal tickets in early January to local households, using grain "especially" procured for the purpose. Later in the month, a group called the Beijing area services team, or *difang fuwu tuan*, presumably an official organ, brought in 1,000 *shi*, or 120,000 *jin*, of millet from Kalgan up north by the Great Wall for distribution to the city's "starving." That same week, General Wang ordered "all patrol squads" under his command to acquire 500 *jin* of corn meal from local grain shops for distribution to destitute households along their beats, handing out 5 *jin* to each household; if more grain was needed, they were ordered to acquire more.[71]

Cash was also distributed by authorities to households, although with apparently less frequency and often on behalf of private donors. A charity art sale had generated $3,010 over several days in late September, which the organizers entrusted to the city police for distribution to poor households in the city. A staffer from the navy bureau – it is unclear if he was acting in an official capacity – was spotted by reporters one morning in late January in a district outside Xizhi gate looking into the needs of poor families there before handing 20 or 40 coppers to each household for a total of 15,000 coppers – enough to buy 3,000 *jin* of grain at local *pingtiao*

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[70] *Shihua*, 12 Aug. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 17 Aug. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 18 Aug. 1920. *Yishi bao*, 2 Sept. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 23 Oct. 1920. Arthur Waldron, *From War to Nationalism: China's turning point, 1924-25* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 101, 126-7, 201, 225. Nathan, *Peking Politics*, 207-8.
[71] *Chenbao*, 5 Jan. 1920. *Beijing baihua bao*, 23 Jan. 1921. *Xiao gongbao*, 27 Jan. 1921.

centers. Other anonymous charitable actors left it to army officials to distribute relief to the poor, including one unnamed man who reportedly donated $8,000 of his own money and raised another $5,000 for a total of $13,000 entrusted to Beijing's army commander – presumably General Wang Huaiqing – for distribution to the city's extreme poor (*jipin*) in late February. This was enough money to purchase a *jin* of grain for a full third of the city's population at *pingtiao* center prices.[72]

Similar amounts of money for distribution reportedly came from the ranks of former officials. In late October, Li Yuanhong, who had served briefly as president of the Republic after the death of Yuan Shikai in 1916, reportedly sent a donation of $10,000 and 5,000 sets of clothes to relief agencies in Beijing for distribution to refugees in the city. A month later, Yin Hefei, an army commander who had served the defeated Anfu faction during the recent July war, idle and unable to secure a position in government, sent a donation of $5,000 to the Interior Ministry for relief of refugees.[73] Unfortunately, a clear picture of the totals for relief handed out in the city to needy residents of the city in 1920-21 is difficult if not impossible to arrive at. But news reports do offer a good amount of detail on relief societies and individuals who performed their own household relief deliveries of their own. We turn now to these.

Private door-to-door relief

In the afternoon of December 22, 1920, Ding Yunxuan and Zhang Yufu knocked on the doors of homes lying beyond Xizhi gate in the northwest of Beijing, and handed out three to five colored tickets to each, depending on the apparent needs of the household. The men were from a charity group called the Xizihui at the Ruxintang, a benevolence hall in the city, and they gave

[72] *Zhongguo minbao*, 1 Oct. 1920. *Yishi bao*, 3 Oct. 1920. *Beijing baihua bao*, 25 Jan. 1920. *Shihua*, 24 Feb. 1921.
[73] *Xiao gongbao*, 31 Oct. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 27 Nov. 1920.

out a total of 554 tickets that day, each redeemable for two *jin* of corn meal at a nearby grain shop. At the end of the month the group reportedly continued the effort, handing out relief clothes and corn meal tickets for four days outside five city gates.[74] Historians Fuma Susumu, Liang Qizi, and Joanna Handlin Smith have studied the emergence and spread of the phenomenon of benevolence halls – extragovernmental organizations devoted to charitable works – in late Ming Henan and their growth thereafter, especially, in the Jiangnan region of south China.[75] In the late Qing and Republican periods, these institutions continued to perform charitable services such as the distribution above, often in the small volumes reflective of their local character. Sidney Gamble discussed these institutions briefly in 1919, using the term *shantang*, and counted six of them in the capital, all in the South City. He described them as "private charitable associations that are supported by the contributions of their members," adding that "most of their work is outdoor relief" (the term at the time for aid to the poor performed outside the confines of charity workhouses and other institutions). He wrote that in 1919 it had been unfortunately "impossible to secure any detailed report of the work of these associations."[76] As social and institutional phenomenona, it is unclear how, or if, these benevolence halls should be distinguished from the many small relief groups operating throughout the city in 1920-21; grouping these extragovernmental activities together, though, it becomes clear that considerable relief was reaching the city's poor beyond that provided by police and other municipal authorities.

A few weeks into the 1921 new year, the pages of the news daily *Shihua* reported that Bai Shaochang and Tu Zaifang, staffers from the city's Charity Poor Relief Society, or *Beijing cishan jiupin hui*, a group of unclear origin, escorted 36,700 *jin* of millet and wheat flour down

[74] *Beijing baihua bao*, 23 Dec. 1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 29 Dec. 1920.
[75] Smith, *The Art of Doing Good.* Liang, *Shishan yu jiaohua*. Fuma, *Zhongguo shanhui*.
[76] Gamble, *Social Survey*, 283.

the railway from Suiyuan and Datong on the edge of near Inner Mongolia for relief distribution before the end of the lunar year. Around the same time in January, Ying Lianzhi, working for a group founded by Bao Ruichen called the Beijing Emergency Relief Society, or *Zhengji jipin hui*, canvassed households in the western suburbs with a garrison escort, distributing 65 *shi*, or 10,400 *jin*, of millet there at a rate of two to three *jin* a person. News reports regularly documented the group's operations from January to April 1921, which comprised handouts of clothes, coppers, and grain tickets to households downtown and in all four suburbs.[77]

The early Republic also saw a new kind of relief organ, those stemming from religious groups seeking to syncretize world faiths, the most active of which in 1920-21 Beijing was the *Wushanshe*, or Society for Awakening Goodness, founded by the same General Jiang Yucheng who had initiated the Grain Relief Society examined earlier. (Jiang had also taken on the Buddhist/Taoist appellation Dazhong.) We can sketch the nature of General Jiang's curious but overlooked group – of a type Prasenjit Duara in his study of such groups in the 1930s Northeast calls "redemptive societies"[78] – from the observations made in 1925 by a former professor at Nanking University, Paul de Witt Twinem. Twinem relates that the group was founded in Beijing in 1918 – although he does not mention Jiang or any of its founders by name – and remarks that it was popular with the older generation (the new generation, he remarked, was more prone to jettison religion for the new one of science). The *Wushanshe* chapter in Nanjing, where Professor Twinem made his investigations, had been organized in 1921 and, still small in 1925, mostly comprised "ex-officials and Confucianists," he noted. "In fact the leading man has control over the large Confucian Temple of the city and the society is located in buildings which formerly belonged to the temple." Other branches had been established in Tianjin, Jinan,

[77] *Shihua*, 20 Jan. 1921. *Beijing baihua bao*, 28 Jan 1921. *Jinghua ribao*, 5 March 1921. *Guobao*, 1 April 1921.
[78] Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 103-5.

Qingdao, Nanchang, Canton, and even Singapore, but Twinem reckoned the only following of note was in Beijing. Its primary character was as a religious organization embracing five major world faiths, minus Judaism.[79]

"The three rules of action stated in [the *Wushanshe*] magazine reveal something of its general nature," wrote Twinem in 1925. "They are (1) 'Every day to exercise self-control.' (2) 'To persuade men to do good.' (3) 'To help the poor.'" Curiously, the Nanjing Christian community did not appear eager to associate with the group: members of the *Wushanshe*'s Nanjing branch apologized to Professor Twinem the "first time [he] visited the altar-room, for not having a picture of Christ" on the wall – the room had tablets to Confucius, Guatama, Laozi, Mohammed and Jesus, but no image of the latter – "explaining that no one was willing to sell them one." (If not the group's liberal embrace of multiple faiths, its unorthodox rituals – which included a "mystic planchette" in a box of sand before the altar used in the fashion of a ouija board – may have been a turn off to Christians.)[80]

In 1920, General Jiang Yucheng's founding chapter of the *Wushanshe* in Beijing had started handing out corn meal tickets to poor households as early as late July,[81] intensifying its activities in winter when still other groups joined what became a field of at least fifteen charity relief agencies operating in the city and its suburbs. (See **Table 3** for examples – limited to those pulled from a handful of city newspapers – of neighborhood relief activity over the course of the

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[79] In one of the few studies to cover the Wushanshe (which makes it worth mentioning here to avoid confusion) Wing-tsit Chan apparently mistakes it with the Six Sages Union True Dao Society, or Liu shen chen dao tongyi hui, a group founded, according to Twinem, in Chengdu, Sichuan, in 1921 by Tang Huanzhang (Chan dates its founding "about" 1915), which also embraced five world religions with the addition of Judaism, before spreading to other major Chinese cities. Wing-tsit Chan, *Religious Trends in Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), 165-6. Paul de Witt Twinem, "Modern Syncretic Religious Societies in China. II," *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 5, No. 6 (Nov., 1925), 595-606. Curiously, possibly the most comprehensive study of these so-called syncretic or redemptive societies, or *huidaomen*, includes no apparent mention of the Wushanshe: Shao Yong, *Zhongguo huidaomen* (Chinese Syncretic Societies) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chuban she, 1997).
[80] Twinem, "Modern Syncretic Religious Societies in China. I," 463-82.
[81] *Shihua*, 30 July 1920.

1920-21 crisis.) With the arrival of cold weather in October, the society opened a ten-room refugee "warming shelter (*nuanchang*)" in a temple outside Desheng gate, which was reportedly "packed to the brim not long after opening," when construction was underway on another ten-room warming facility outside Yongding gate.[82]

Funding for the group's operations came in part from fundraising over several days in October at five entertainment spots around the city, including the South City Amusement Park and the New World, the latter "a sort of miniature 'Coney Island,'" in the words of Sidney Gamble, complexes in Western architectural style and modeled after Shanghai precedents that had been built by Chinese merchants in the 1910s. For an entry of 30 coppers at the New World, there were "distorting mirrors," a "ring toss," "toy shooting," a theater and cinema, as well as a rooftop garden serving tea, as Madeleine Yue Dong explains. By the famous Temple of Heaven, ten coppers at the South City Amusement Park won entry to performances of "comic crosstalk," and "vocal mimicry" while at a "new-style theater" "early movie stars" performed plays that "were not only Western in form but also characterized by content either directly adopted from Western work or focused on conflict between Chinese and Western values," Dong adds, "with obvious criticism of the old Chinese value system."[83] In the company of these attractions, the Wushanshe hung drawings "depicting the various hardships" of refugees above counters where staffers solicited donations from the public. The event was reported ahead of time in major Beijing dailies *Chenbao* and *Yishi bao*, as well as more obscure ones like *Jinghua ribao*; donors were later thanked in the central government weekly gazette, *Zhengfu gongbao*, in a lengthy list that gave a good idea of the social, institutional and regional diversity of the group's

[82] *Chenbao*, 19 Oct. 1920. *Fengsheng*, 19 Oct. 1920.
[83] Dong, *Republican Beijing*, 201-2. Gamble, *Social Survey*, 238.

contributors.[84] Within days of the October drive, the group was reportedly building two more ten-room warming shelters outside Zuo'an and You'an gates (adding, in November, a yarn workshop in a rug factory outside Suiwen gate, and bringing in several dozen children from the disaster zone to be trained in textiles there.) Members of the society reportedly distributed clothes and corn meal tickets on four consecutive days in late December outside half a dozen city gates.[85] The group even projected its relief activities deep into the famine zone in 1920-21, as we saw in our section on Cang County in chapter two, where it delivered 700 sacks of millet and sorghum.

Table 3: Relief to greater Beijing households by city charities, 1920-21

Organization	Members cited in source	Items distributed	Location of distribution	News source & date, 1920-21
Society for Awakening Goodness (*Wushanshe* 悟善社)	General Jiang Yucheng, founder	Corn meal	Outside Houmen gate	*Shihua*, July 30
		Clothes and corn meal tickets	Outside Chaoyang, Zuo'an, Guang'an, Fucheng, and Xizhi gates on the 25th, 26th, 27th and 28th	*Zhongguo minbao*, Dec 29
		Corn meal	Outside Anding and Desheng gates	*Xiao minbao*, Jan 8
	Zhu Baoyu, staffer	Clothes, coppers	Suburbs	*Shihua*, Jan 23
		Clothes and coppers	Eastern, northern and western suburbs on the 23rd and 24th	*Xiao minbao*, Jan 25

[84] The list consisted largely of many dozen names of people credited with modest donations; larger donations included $1,000 from the wife (*taitai*) of a military general surnamed Chen; $637 from the Jiading County Chamber of Commerce outside Shanghai; $500 from a British military official; $400 from the Suzhou customs office; $300 from the metropolitan branch of the Chinese Red Cross; $250 from a woman surnamed Qian; $111 raised at the Zhili Province Finance Bureau; $372, $100 and $12 raised by the magistrates of three contiguous and unafflicted counties northwest of Beijing by the Great Wall – Xuanhua, Zhuolu, and Huailai counties, respectively; $100 from the Interior Ministry; $16 from an anonymous woman; and, finally, $200 from society founder Jiang Yucheng himself. *Jinghua ribao*, 10 Oct. 1920. *Yishi bao*, 20 Oct 1920. *Chenbao*, 24 Oct. 1920. *Zhengfu gongbao*, 1 Feb. 1921.

[85] The Wushanshe crops again briefly in a history covering relief later in the decade in neighboring Tianjin: there in 1926, a Mr. Bian Jieqing of that city's Wushanshe branch established a Yellow Cross Society, or Huang shizi hui, and set up a shelter and soup kitchen at a temple and hospital grounds, taking in 2,000 war refugees. By 1925, according to Twinem, the Wushanshe was working closely with the Red Swastika Society, and the group's "Relief Department" made house visits to the poor. *Fengsheng*, 27 Oct. 1920. *Shihua*, 20 Nov. 1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 29 Dec. 1920. Ren, *Jindai Tianjin de cishan*, 84. Twinem, "Modern Syncretic Religious Societies in China. I," 468.

		500 sets of clothing and 7,520 *jin* of millet (2-3 *jin* and a set of clothes to each person)	Near west Beijing's Yuanming Park	*Beijing baihua bao*, Jan 27
Northwest Beijing Mother-Infant Relief Society (*Furu jiuji hui* 婦孺救濟會)		2,000 *jin* corn meal	Northwest Beijing	*Xiao gongbao*, Sept 2
		14,000 *jin* millet, 7,000 *jin* corn meal	Northwest Beijing	*Chenbao*, Sept 11
		2,400 *jin* corn meal (1-5 *jin* each)	Northwest Beijing	*Aiguo baihua bao*, Sept 23
YMCA (Beijing) 北京青年會		302 *jin* corn meal, 24 items of clothing	Unspecified	*Xiao gongbao*, Dec 4
YMCA		30,629.5 *jin* of corn meal and 4,646 *jin* of flour purchased with $1,786.65 donated from the Bank of China out of its annual banquet budget	To 4,609 "destitute" households in 20 districts inside and outside the city	*Chenbao*, Feb 17
The Ruxintang (如心堂) benevolence hall's charity group (*Xizihui* 惜字會)	Ding Yunxuan, Zhang Yufu, staffers	554 tickets of 2 *jin* each (3-5 tickets to each home)	Outside Xizhi gate	*Beijing baihua bao*, Dec 23
		Clothes and corn meal tickets	Outside Chaoyang, Zuo'an, Guang'an, Fucheng, and Xizhi gates on the 25th, 26th, 27th and 28th	*Zhongguo minbao*, Dec 29
Manchurian Solidarity Society (*Manzhou tongjin hui* 滿洲同進會 or *Manzu tongjin hui* 滿族同進會)	Zeng Zigu, head	$10,000 total ($1-2 each, or 100-200 coppers each)	To bannermen outside Chaoyang gate	*Chenbao*, Dec 31
Beijing Emergency Relief Society (*Zhengji jipin hui* 拯濟極貧會) or Regional Disaster Relief Society (*Jinji zhenzai hui* 近畿賑災會)	Bao Ruichen, head	Silver and copper coins	Outside Desheng, Anding, Dongzhi gates	*Xiao minbao*, Jan 7
	Wen Hai, Luo Zhenyu, also named as heads	"Several thousand dollars" and 2,000 items of clothing	Xiling and Dongling districts	*Zhongguo minbao*, Jan 21
		Clothes and coppers	Eastern, northern and western suburbs on the 23rd and 24th	*Xiao minbao*, Jan 25

	Ying Lianzhi, staffer	65 *shi*, or 10,400 *jin*, of millet (2-3 *jin* to each person)	Western suburbs	*Beijing baihua bao*, Jan 28
		Cotton clothes and coppers: 50, 100, 200 coppers to each household	Inside Anding gate	*Beijing baihua bao*, Jan 30
		10-20 *diao* each (100 or 200 coppers) plus $1 silver	Yellow Bannermen housing outside Anding and Desheng gates	*Beijing baihua bao*, Feb 1
		40-80 coppers each	To bannermen families in western suburbs	*Beijing baihua bao*, Feb 16
		2,500 tickets each for 3 *jin* of corn meal	Western Beijing	*Jinghua ribao*, March 5
		10-20 *diao* (100 or 200 coppers) or $5-7 silver	Outside Chaoyang gate	*Shihua*, March 15
	Wen Hai, Luo Zhenyu, also named as heads	Silver and copper coins	Western Beijing	*Guo bao*, March 21
		Tickets redeemable for cash	Five distribution teams to downtown and all four suburbs	*Shihua*, March 27
		80, 100, or 200 coppers	Nei and zuo city districts	*Guo bao*, April 1
Corn Bread Temporary Relief Society (*Linshi wowotouhui* 臨時窩窩頭會)	Cheng Qiyuan, founder	30,000 *jin* corn meal	Bannermen households in western suburbs	*Aiguo baihua bao*, Jan 18
		30,000 tickets (2 *jin* of corn meal per ticket)	Unspecified	*Chenbao*, Jan 31
		5,000 tickets for 1 *jin* each of corn meal	Distributed by garrisons throughout the city	*Shihua*, March 1
Beijing Charity Poor Relief Society (*Cishan jiupin hui* 北京慈善救貧會)	Bai Shaochang, Tu Zaifang, staffers	36,700 *jin* millet and flour from Datong and Xuanhua, etc. (north of Beijing)	Unknown	*Shihua*, Jan 20
North China Relief Society (*Huabei jiuzai xiehui* 華北救災會)	Liang Shiyi, founder	Clothes, silver dollars, coppers	Villages/towns in four suburbs on the 21st and 22nd	*Xiao minbao*, Jan 23
Ciyouyuan charity girls school (慈幼院女學校)		Clothes, silver dollars, coppers	Villages/towns in four suburbs on the 21st and 22nd	*Xiao minbao*, Jan 23
Lu Zhenhua, headmaster of Beijing's Guangyi School, Lu was also associated with the relief group below		10,000 coppers over two days (20-40 coppers each person)	Outside Xizhi gate	*Xiao gongbao*, Jan 8

Beijing Poor Relief Society (*Beijing pinmin jiuji hui* 北京貧民救濟會)	Lu Zhenhua, vice chair, and Han Tao, staffer	Clothes, silver dollars, coppers	Villages/towns in four suburbs on the 21st and 22nd	*Xiao minbao*, Jan 23
		Clothes and coppers	Eastern, northern and western suburbs on the 23rd and 24th	*Xiao minbao*, Jan 25
	Lu Zhenhua, vice chair	700 *jin* grain (2, 4, 12 *jin* to each person)	Taipingzhuang village outside Xizhi gate	*Beijing baihua bao*, Feb 2
		40 or 80 coppers to each, unspecified total	Outside Chaoyang gate	*Shihua*, March 12
Unspecified relief society (*zhenji hui*)		Clothes and coppers	Northern suburbs on the 27th and 28th	*Shihua*, Jan 30
Metropolitan Poor Relief Society Branch (*Jingji jipin fenhui* 京畿救貧分會)[86]	Zhang Jingli, head	Each recipient received 1-2 tickets redeemable for 5 *jin* of millet	Inside Desheng gate at the entrance to the Manchu Yellow Bannermen offices	*Beijing baihua bao*, Feb 6
The *Fuyintang* benevolence hall (福音堂) at east Beijing's Horse Market		10 coppers to each poor person		*Beijing baihua bao*, Feb 13

That same month of January, 1921, General Jiang Yucheng was contacted by Cheng Qiyuan, founder of a charity called the *Wowotouhui*, or Corn Bread Society, which over the previous seven years had raised money each winter for the purchase of corn meal for distribution to the city's poor. Cheng's society and Jiang's *Wushanshe* hired several reportedly famous traditional Chinese drama actors for two evening performances at Beijing's No. 1 Theater on the 8th and 9th of January, with all proceeds from ticket sales to go to the purchase of corn meal for distribution. Staged drama, "probably the most popular sort of organized recreation" in the capital circa 1920, according to Sidney Gamble, could generate sizable proceeds for charitable endeavors, making theaters one of the most common fundraising venues for refugee and poor relief. The No. 1 Theater, the capital's premier theatrical venue, had a capacity of 1,000 and

[86] The article mentions that recipients were exclusively bannermen and the society "might as well be called a bannermen relief society."

premium-priced tickets ranging from $8 for a box down to 30 cents for the cheapest seat; the biggest stars commanded $100 to $300 "for every drama in which they act," according to Gamble, and could therefore generate considerable sums for charity.[87] The city boasted 22 regular theaters at the time, almost all of them around the South City commercial and entertainment districts. Income from performances was commonly split 30 percent and 70 percent respectively for the theater owner and acting troupe, which often contracted for a temporary residence at a particular theater. It is very likely that one of the famed performers enlisted by the *Wowotouhui* was Mei Lanfang, 26 at the time and one of the most influential Peking opera stars of the modern era. Society founder Cheng had approached Mei for such a performance at Beijing's premier theater the month before, after the *Wowotouhui* had paved the way for its 1920-21 winter operations with a planning meeting at a benevolence hall in the city (the Benevolence Hall of Kind Abundance, or Huifengtang). Mei was by all appearances willing, having himself organized two days' worth of theatrical fundraisers for relief as early as September when, along with actors Chen Delin and Wang Fengqing, he had performed for the benefit of an unspecified relief fund. A month later, Mei worked with the City Poor Relief Society, or *Pinmin jiuji hui*, co-founded by Li Zhenhua, to host a Saturday night event at Beijing's No. 1 Theater together with six major actors performing, including Yang Xiaolou, Liu Hongsheng, Chen Delin, Gong Yunfu.[88]

Within two weeks of January's joint benefit, both Jiang's Wushanshe and Cheng's Wowotou hui were reportedly carrying out relief efforts in the city suburbs: Jiang's group had sent staffer Zhu Baoyu with unspecified amounts of clothes and coppers for distribution in the

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[87] Gamble, *Social Survey*, 226.

[88] Several of these same celebrities, including Mei Lanfang, would appear later in March 1921 on the bill of a famine relief fundraiser organized by the association of natives (*tongxiang*) of the three northeastern provinces sojourning in the capital, held at the Fengtian *huiguan* in Beijing. *Xiao minbao*, 7 Jan. 1921. *Xiao gongbao*, 16 Dec. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 21 Sept. 1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 28 Oct. 1920. *Guobao*, 3 March 1921.

eastern, northern and western suburbs on the 22nd, 23rd, and 24th, before handing out 500 sets of clothing and 7,520 *jin* of millet (at two to three *jin* and a set of clothes each person) a few days later to poor households near west Beijing's Yuanming Park. For its part, Cheng's group distributed 30,000 *jin*-worth of corn meal to poor bannermen households in the western suburbs the same week before handing out 2,000 *jin* of corn meal downtown early the next month, which had been entrusted to the group for distribution by donor Wang Youfu, a resident of a downtown *hutong*.[89]

Other individuals chose to perform their own distributions, often with security details of gendarmes. One of the first of these bulk private relief acts to appear in the press at the outset of the 1920 food crisis occurred in summer in one of Beijing's most impoverished areas. The poor comprised 15.8 percent of the district of Houhai, an area of small lakes just west of the Bell and Drum towers between the Imperial City and the north city wall, giving it the distinction of being the only district in Beijing's North City to have a poverty rate above the official city average of 11.95 percent. Houhai also sat in the heavily Manchu "Tartar" section of the city, and its 6,471 "very poor" inhabitants comprised the highest number of destitute in all of walled Beijing, North and South. (Today, Houhai's labyrinth of lakeside lanes hosts one of the highest concentrations of bars in the capital.) From Houhai, in 1920, one could walk to the district's poorer suburban counterpart through Desheng gate, passing the stalls of a sugar and a toy market (one of three in the city), and a cluster of two prisons on the way.[90] It was there just beyond the city's north wall that on the 17th of August, 1920, according to the city's *Aiguo baihua bao* news daily, local gentry (*shenshi*) Zhang Hanqing purchased 300 *bao* of rice, or 48,000 *jin*, reportedly with his own money, and with a garrison escort handed out 5 *jin* of rice to residents of poor households in

[89] *Shihua*, 23 Jan. 1921. *Xiao minbao*, 25 Jan. 1921. *Beijing baihua bao*, 27 Jan. 1921. *Aiguo baihua bao*, 18 Jan. 1921. *Beijing baihua bao*, 5 Feb. 1921.
[90] Gamble, *Social Survey*, 214, 272, 486.

his district, or roughly ten days' worth of half-*jin* relief rations to 9,600 people. (To put this into perspective, this was a number equal to precisely ten percent of walled Beijing's officially "poor" and "very poor" populations the year before).

Later that Fall, on the 23rd of November, in a suburban neighborhood outside Anding gate roughly two kilometers to the east, the Chen household summoned gendarmes to their compound to oversee the distribution of 5,700 cotton outfits and 10,800 Beijing *diao*, or 108,000 coppers, to the area poor, enough money to purchase 21,600 *jin* of grain at local *pingtiao* centers, again according to *Aiguo baihua bao*, a minor tabloid-sized paper whose news briefs were peppered with such reports of charity. The Chen family, purveyors of Mongolian goods, reportedly handed out "huge sums" of relief items "every year" to the district poor, according to another news source, the news daily *Shihua*: cotton clothes, pucks of coal, corn meal, and various medicines, and they followed up this formidable handout in 1920 with a distribution of 800 items of new cotton clothing to the poor in the vicinity of their home on the 24th and 25th of November, clothes reportedly specially-ordered for the occasion.

Re-entering the city and crossing to its very center through the imperial city's Di'an gate, we come to the household of a girl named Xiuqin who, a month later on the 28th of December, reportedly broke into the family safe – her father, Yang Tianji, head of the municipal tax office, was out on an errand – and took out $100 silver. Dashing outside to convert it to coppers, according to, again, *Aiguo baihua bao*, the girl handed out 50 coppers to nearby poor, potentially ten day's worth of relief rations for 300 people, all before returning home to a "furious" father.[91] While these were some of the more colorful stories of generosity among neighbors to appear in the press over the course of the crisis, they form only part of a larger arena of household relief

[91] *Aiguo baihua bao*, 19 Aug. 1920. *Aiguo baihua bao*, 25 Nov. 1920. *Shihua*, 26 Nov. 1920. *Aiguo baihua bao*, 31 Dec. 1920.

that served to supplement the discounted supplies of *pingtiao* centers and meals served at municipal and charity soup kitchens. (For additional instances appearing in the press, see **Table 4**.) Unfortunately, the total amount of sustenance provided to the poor over the 1920-21 crisis in this fashion, by both charities and individual handouts, can only be left to conjecture.

Table 4: Relief to greater Beijing households by individuals, 1920-21

Relief actor	Items and amount distributed (when available)	Location of distribution	News source & date, 1920-21
Local gentry Zhang Hanqing	300 *bao* rice (48,000 *jin*) bought with his own money; 5 *jin* to each person	Outside Desheng gate	*Aiguo baihua bao*, Aug. 19
Chen Yuquan, resident	1,000 *jin* corn meal (bought with $10 gold gifted to him by a friend)	Outside Suiwen gate	*Yishi bao*, Sept. 3
Resident Ji Zishou, general of the Mongol red banner (*zheng hong Meng dutong*)	530 Beijing *diao*, or strings of 10 coppers, to 1,500 people (4 coppers to adults, 2 to children)	On a downtown *hutong*	*Aiguo baihua bao*, Oct. 14
Unidentified philanthropist (*mo cishan jia*)	Tickets each good for 2 *jin* of corn meal; "destitute" families reach received "several dozen coppers" in addition	Unclear	*Chenbao*, Nov. 11
A man surnamed Ma	A ticket for 2-3 *jin* of corn meal; and, to each "destitute person," an additional 20 coppers	Outside Chaoyang gate	*Aiguo baihua bao*, Nov. 22
Chen household outside Anding gate	5,700 sets of clothes and 10,800 *diao* (108,000 coppers)	To local poor on the 23rd of November	*Aiguo baihua bao*, Nov. 25
Unidentified philanthropist (*mo da shanshi*)	200 cotton pants; in addition, "destitute" families received 50 coppers each	Beijing North-South Main Street (Nanbei zhong jie) and Eighth Alley (Ba xiang)	*Minyi ribao*, Nov. 29
Hu Liantian, manager of Capital Jade Car Dealership	500 tickets for 2-3 *jin* redeemable at a local grainstore	Western suburbs outside Xizhi gate	*Xiao gongbao*, Nov. 29
Chen household on Suzhou *hutong* inside Suiwen gate	Tickets for 3 *jin* of corn meal or 20 coppers to unspecified number of people	Outside Jihua gate	*Xiao gongbao*, Dec. 7
Household of Ding Fukui residing at a cigarette factory outside Di'an gate	Several hundred tickets for 2 *jin* of corn meal each (each person received 1-2 tickets)	Outside Desheng gate	*Zhongguo minbao*, Dec. 8
Unidentified philanthropist man (*mo cishan jia*)	Tickets for 4 *jin* of corn meal to an unspecified number of people	Downtown	*Chenbao*, Dec. 17

Shao Fuchen, philanthropist (*da cishan jia*)	"Several thousand *jin*" of corn meal to poor households (afterwards, distributed clothes at a soup kitchen)	Northwest Beijing	*Xiao gongbao*, Dec. 23
Yang Xiuqin, daughter of a tax office official	$100 changed to coppers (each person received 50 coppers)	Inside Di'an gate	*Aiguo baihua bao*, Dec. 31
Mr. Harding, from the British Embassy	Corn meal tickets, unspecified number	Southern suburbs	*Aiguo baihua bao*, Jan. 7
Li Yuzhen	5 coppers to each person, unspecified total	Outside Chaoyang and Dongzhi gates	*Xiao minbao*, Jan. 8
Chen Huailin, high school student resident outside Di'an gate	240 coppers of saved lunch money (2-3 each person)	Outside Di'an gate	*Beijing baihua bao*, Jan. 17
Unidentifie philanthropist (*mo cishan jia*)	4-6 *jin* of flour to each family; "destitute" families received 40 coppers in addition	Inside Zuo'an gate	*Chenbao*, Jan. 23
Fang Yannian, philanthropist (*cishan jia*)	Clothes, silver dollars, coppers	Villages/towns in four suburbs on the 21st and 22nd	*Xiao minbao*, Jan. 23
Wang Shougong, Navy Bureau official	Clothes and coppers	Eastern, northern and western suburbs on the 23rd and 24th	*Xiao minbao*, Jan. 25
Feng Yingkai, clandestine officer (*mimi*) of the Finance Ministry	20,000 coppers (20-40 coppers each person)	Outside Xizhi gate	*Xiao gongbao*, Jan. 26
Yan Mingyun, head of the Neiyanwu gate library	21,000 coppers (10-20 coppers each person)	Western suburbs	*Beijing baihua bao*, Jan. 27
A man surnamed Li, employee of the Ministry of Justice (Sifa bu)	Flour and coal tickets	Outside Chaoyang gate	*Shihua*, Jan 30
Wang Heyin, philanthropist (*da cishan jia*)	5 *jiao* to each person, total unreported	Around Xizhi gate	*Xiao gongbao*, Jan. 28
Mongolian prince Nazhentu	5,000 *jin* of corn meal distributed by police	Northern suburbs	*Beijing baihua bao*, Jan. 30
Wang Youfu, resident	2,000 *jin* of corn meal for the Corn Bread Society to hand out	Downtown	*Beijing baihua bao*, Feb. 5

Beijing municipal soup kitchens normally ran until the end of February, but in light of the ongoing crisis, General Wang Huaiqing, Police Chief Yin Hongshou and the new administrator for the metropolitan region, surnamed Sun, decided in January to keep them operating at least another month, using, in part, funds of confiscated stolen goods and revenues from criminal fines to finance the extension. Towards the end of March, with continued freezing temperatures, the three men decided to extend operations yet another month to the end of April. (This was a month

later than usual compared to the dates recorded by Sidney Gamble, who put a minimum length of soup kitchen operation in the 1910s at 100 days, and a maximum of 120 days; for example, municipal facilities had operated from December 1 to April 1 in 1918. Compared to previous years, then, official soup kitchens appear to have operated in 1920-21 for 75 more days than previous "maximums," that is 195 days from October 15 to April 30; locations were also 43 more in number.)[92] With the closing of municipal soup kitchens looming in mid-April, charities stepped in in places to carry the public service further into the spring harvest, such as Xiong Xiling's orphan home in the Western Hills of Beijing, which raised donations to sponsor the establishment of soup kitchens in two villages west of the capital for the area poor to open for a month starting on the 24th of April.[93]

Authorities appeared to have kept close tabs on goings-on in soup kitchens across the metropolitan area. General Wang and other police and military authorities were occupied with identifying and curtailing graft at soup kitchen facilities, according to press reports, sending in "undercover agents (*mitan yuan*)" by rickshaw and horse cart to check on management and conditions at locations in the city and suburbs. The Soup Kitchen Provisioning Bureau also summoned soup kitchen managers and inspectors to its offices in the fall for a conference aimed at "improving (*gailiang*)" the effectiveness of the year's unusually extensive municipal feeding operation. In one case of abuse, a grain supplier was disciplined for supplying a soup kitchen at Mentougou town to the city's west with rotten rice. In another, a plot was discovered at a police-run soup kitchen in a town in Daxing district south of the capital in which gentry were allegedly scheming to profit from the relief operation. In still another, a garrison-run soup kitchen facility

[92] Gamble, *Social Survey*, 277.
[93] *Yishi bao*, 18 Jan. 1921. *Beijing wanbao*, 26 March 1921. *Da zhonghua zizhi gongbao*, 18 April. 1921. *Guobao*, 25 April 1921.

was condemned by a press report for doling out only half a ladle of porridge to each attendee as late as December, after rations were ordered to be increased by the Interior Ministry.[94]

In addition to keeping an eye on malfeasance, inspectors were dispatched to note any special needs of soup kitchen and shelter attendees. On a November 1920 soup kitchen inspection visit made by General Wang himself, which was reported in *Shihua*, Wang reportedly spotted the pitiable attempt of an old man to secure as much porridge as he could onto the only vessel he had, a spoon, prompting Wang to return to the *yamen* to issue a system-wide order to soup kitchen managers to purchase 2,000 ceramic bowls for attendees lacking proper vessels of their own. Wang's order followed a donation of 5,000 ceramic bowls to the Soup Kitchen Provisioning Bureau by an institution called the Ling pavilion of Yuanzuo hall, as reported in *Jiuzai zhoukan*.[95] Also in November, the Interior Ministry sent agents to record the number of elderly soup kitchen attendees without suitable winter attire; within a week, inspectors reportedly found that at one location in particular – the mosque soup kitchen on Nanzhong Street east of the city wall – the poor were "for the most part barely clothed," presumably having sold or pawned off layers of clothing. A month later in mid-December agents from the state Shunzhi Relief Bureau arrived at the mosque and reportedly gave out cotton outfits (*shen*) to each underclothed elderly person and child there.[96]

Relief clothing

As temperatures dropped in the autumn, municipal authorities discovered an alarming number of barely-clothed refugees in the city, prompting clothing distribution operations that

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[94] *Zhenzai ribao*, 5 Nov. 1920. *Zhenzai ribao*, 10 Nov. 1920. *Baihua guoqiang bao*, 17 Nov. 1920. *Minyi ribao*, 4 Nov. 1920. *Minyi ribao*, 1 Dec. 1920. *Shihua*, 22 Dec. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 27 Dec. 1920. *Aiguo baihua bao*, 7 Dec. 1920.
[95] *Shihua*, 7 Nov. 1920. *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 7 Nov. 1920.
[96] *Zhenzai ribao*, 7 Nov. 1920. *Minyi ribao*, 13 Nov. 1920. *Yishi bao*, 18 Dec. 1920.

involved considerable volumes of clothes, and at times from distant parts of the country. In his 1919 survey of the capital, Sidney Gamble noted that "the giving of clothes has long been one of the established methods of relief" in China, but since "most of the clothes are given away through private channels it is impossible to make any estimate of the number of people who are helped during the winter."[97] While it is unfortunately impossible to tally the actual volumes handled during the two dozen incidents of clothes distribution in 1920-21 by charities and individuals noted in **Tables 3** and **4** above, and **Table 6** below, extant reports for the year suggest that municipal authorities in fact conveyed what was likely a much larger amount of clothing than extragovernmental actors over the course of the crisis.

As early as September, metropolitan gendarmerie commander Wang Huaiqing had sent a deputy to a fabric market east of Beijing to "rush order" the production of 3,000 sets of cotton clothing for distribution to city poor. A week later, Prime Minister Jin Yunpeng reportedly launched a plan to cut the badges off of army and police uniforms in storage around the city so to distribute the clothing to refugees, after which President Xu Shichang ordered authorities in each district to tally the numbers of destitute households in their jurisdictions for the purposes of handing out clothes. Within the week, General Wang had secured 10,000 old army uniforms for distribution in districts around Beijing, which had likely originated at the city's state-of-the-art uniform factory. (The facility, erected in 1912 by the Board of War, was one of Beijing's few industrial plants using "modern machinery and quantity production method[s]…under modern factory conditions," according to Gamble.)[98]

In mid-October, Beijing Police Chief Yin Hongshou instructed all precincts to send officers to local pawnshops – where many poor had pawned off their clothes, an annual practice

[97] Gamble, *Social Survey*, 281.
[98] *Shihua*, 30 Sept. 1920. *Shihua*, 4 Oct. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 10 Oct. 1920. *Fengsheng*, 16 Oct. 1920. Gamble, *Social Survey*, 220.

of the poor in spring to secure money for seed or other needs – to "repurchase" clothes for distribution to refugees. Within a few weeks, General Wang had also released 1,000 items of clothing from a warehouse of confiscated items and personally donated money for the mass purchase of cotton thread, which was distributed to city and suburban soup kitchens for attendees to convert into clothes for themselves. A week later, in mid-November, the Soup Kitchen Provisioning Bureau sent agents to neighboring Tianjin with the same idea of procuring material in bulk for distribution at soup kitchen facilities around Beijing for attendees to sew winter clothes for themselves.[99]

The military was a major source of relief clothes for distribution in city districts and at soup kitchen and shelter facilities around the region (see **Table 5**). The military governor of Anhui, Zhang Wensheng, sent 50,000 outfits of relief clothing in December to Beijing, escorted there by 12 soldiers a week after he had reportedly sent 500,000 *jin* of relief grain to unspecified districts in the famine zone (*zai qu*).[100] The navy bureau brought in twenty tons of clothes by rail to Beijing in the same month of December, after which, starting in January, the country's top navy official, Sa Zhenbing–who had attended a naval academy in England while the famine of the 1870s ravaged much of his home country–launched a distribution at noon each day of the week of "several thousand" coats and pants in front of the navy headquarters in Beijing.[101]

[99] *Xiao gongbao*, 19 Oct. 1920. *Minyi ribao*, 4 Nov. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 15 Nov. 1920.
[100] *Aiguo baihua bao*, 24 Dec. 1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 17 Dec. 1920.
[101] It might be added that, for no clear reason, Sa, a native of Fujian, had in the previous fall repeatedly dispatched special shipments of relief to Ci County deep in the south of Zhili on the border with Henan: "several hundred *shi*" of millet in October, another 170 *shi* of millet and 2,000 sets of cotton clothes in November. *Xiao gongbao*, 9 Jan. 1921. *Zhengfu gongbao*, 13 June 1921. *Da gongbao*, 10 Oct. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 5 Nov. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 9 Nov. 1920. Xu, *Mingguo renwu*, 2591-2.

Table 5: Official garment distributions in greater Beijing, 1920-21

Initiator	Item	Use/Location	News source & date, 1920-21
General Wang Huaiqing	3,000 *tao* (sets) of cotton clothing	Distribution to city poor	*Shihua*, Sept. 30
General Wang Huaiqing	5,000 *tao* (sets) "rush-ordered" at the Huasheng clothing market in east Beijing	Distribution to city poor	*Yishi bao*, Oct. 13
General Wang Huaiqing	10,000 old army uniforms	Distribution in each Beijing district	*Fengsheng*, Oct. 16
General Wang Huaiqing	1,000 *jian* (items) of clothing from a warehouse of confiscated items	City and suburban soup kitchens	*Minyi ribao*, Nov. 4
Zhang Zuolin, military governor of the three northeastern provinces	1,000 *jian* (items) of clothing	To the Soup Kitchen Provisioning Bureau for city soup kitchens	*Shangye ribao*, Nov. 6
Office of the Metropolitan Administrator (*jingzhao yin*)	13,635 *jian* (items) of clothing	To the Soup Kitchen Provisioning Bureau for distribution	*Jiuzai zhoukan*, Nov. 7
The 49th company (*tuan*) of the 13th army division	11,586 *jian* (items) of clothing	To the Soup Kitchen Provisioning Bureau for distribution	*Jiuzai zhoukan*, Nov. 7
The 13th army division as a whole	10,730 *jian* (items) of clothing	To the Soup Kitchen Provisioning Bureau for distribution	*Jiuzai zhoukan*, Nov. 7
Office of the prime minister	2,000 *jian* (items) & 2,000 *jin* of cotton	To the Soup Kitchen Provisioning Bureau for distribution	*Jiuzai zhoukan*, Nov. 7
Beijing Police Bureau	10,000 *tao* (sets) of clothing	To the Soup Kitchen Provisioning Bureau for distribution	*Jiuzai zhoukan*, Nov. 7
Officers and soldiers serving in the four Beijing suburbs under the metropolitan garrison, or *tishu*	10,000 used army uniforms plus unspecified amount of special-ordered clothing financed with donations from garrison officers	For distribution by the army *yamen* in stricken areas, presumably in its metropolitan jurisdiction	*Shihua*, Nov. 9
Navy Bureau	20 tons of clothes	By rail to Beijing for distribution in December 1920	*Zhengfu gongbao*, June 13
Capital Police Bureau	1,000 *tao* (sets) of clothing	By rail to Beijing for distribution in December 1920	*Zhengfu gongbao*, June 13
Government Relief Bureau	20,000 *jian* (items) of clothing	To the army *yamen* for distribution to the suburban poor by district garrisons	*Shihua*, Dec. 7
Zhang Wensheng, military governor of Anhui Province	50,000 *shen* (outfits)	Escorted by 12 soldiers to the Government Relief Bureau for distribution in Beijing	*Aiguo baihua bao*, Dec. 24
President Xu Shichang	5,000 *tao* (sets) of clothes	Orders subordinates to purchase and send to district authorities for distribution	*Yishi bao*, Jan. 15

Manager of the Beijing-Suiyuan rail line	9,000 *jian* (items) of clothing	From railroad police storage to the Government Relief Bureau for distribution	*Beijing baihua bao*, Jan. 15
Metropolitan Relief Bureau (*jingzhao zhenwu chu*)	13,200 *jian* (items) of clothing	For distribution to the poor in the 20 counties of the metropolitan region	*Qunbao*, Feb. 3
Soup Kitchen Provisioning Bureau	2,500 *tao*, or sets, of clothing	West Beijing's Guandi Temple	*Xiao gongbao*, Feb. 4

Judging by the events reported in **Table 5** alone, military, police and other official distributions in 1920-21 amounted to 178,651 items or suits of relief clothing, enough to help layer each of the 96,850 residents classified "poor" and "very poor" in Beijing's downtown North and South sections, plus another 81,801 refugees, suburbanites or formerly middling residents who had fallen into the lower tier due to the food crisis. This amount, it should be noted, excludes the Navy's 20 ton-shipment, whose 33,600 *jin* of clothing may have contained another 40,000 items. By comparison, the "police and Military Guard" had given clothes to only 5,740 city residents in the winter of 1916-17, according to Gamble (plus another unspecified amount to the "inmates of the charitable institutions").[102]

Charities and individuals also distributed relief clothing throughout the winter of 1920-21, but in smaller volumes than the military and police. (See **Table 6**.) Back in September, the Chinese Red Cross, whose headquarters on the Goldfish *hutong* inside Suiwen gate housed philanthropist Xiong Xiling's newly-formed Beiwusheng relief society, put out a call to the "charitable members of the public (*ge da cishan jia*)" to gather unused adult and children clothing in their homes. The drive was presumably launched, in part, by Xiong's wife, Zhu Qihui, who was active in numerous Red Cross groups in the capital, as we saw in chapter one. *Pingtiao* operators supplied poorly-clothed patrons at their grain discount centers with extra layers, such as the Zhili Gentry Pingtiao Society, which in early October put in a special order for 1,000 sets

[102] Gamble, *Social Survey*, 282.

of coats and pants, and handed out tickets at its centers redeemable within ten days' time. Charities like the Wushanshe distributed clothes with its grain and money handout efforts, and at times entrusted the job to authorities, such as when the group gave 1,600 pieces of clothing to the army *yamen* in January for its soldiers to distribute to the poor west of the city.[103]

With the acceleration of clothes distribution in December, incidents of graft and apparent favoritism in clothes allocation by district police appeared in the press.[104] Another concern was that clothes recipients would pawn their relief clothes for food, and in late October the city police chief prohibited the acceptance of relief clothes by pawnshops in and outside the city, a ban that was reiterated throughout the fall and winter.[105] In December, the city announced fines of between $10-50 for anyone purchasing relief clothes from the poor or from refugees, and within days the press reported an incident in which a passing police officer spotted a refugee selling the clothes he had received from the district *yamen* to a local man; the buyer – but not the poor seller – was promptly arrested and fined $20. Then, in February, when *yamen* officials caught wind of the existence of a stockpile of relief clothes at a clothing merchant's warehouse outside Di'an gate, investigators found 50 items there tagged with the name of a city relief group, and fined the warehouse $30.[106]

Table 6: Private garment distributions in greater Beijing, 1920-21[107]

Initiator	Clothes volume	Use/Location	News source & date, 1920-21
Zhili Gentry Pingtiao Society (*Zhi shen pingtiao ju* 直紳平糶局)	1,000 sets of coats and pants	*Pingtiao* centers	*Shihua*, Oct. 3
Certain philanthropist (*mo da cishan jia*)	500 sets	School grounds inside Xizhi gate	*Yishi bao*, Oct. 10

[103] *Shihua*, 3 Oct. 1920. *Chenbao*, 21 Jan. 1921.
[104] *Shihua*, 8 Dec. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 13 Dec. 1920. *Shihua*, 24 Dec. 1920.
[105] *Shihua*, 31 Oct. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 11 Nov. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 6 Jan. 1921.
[106] *Xiao gongbao*, 16 Dec. 1920. *Shihua*, 20 Dec. 1920. *Shihua*, 26 Feb. 1921.
[107] Note that Tables 3 and 4 include instances in which clothes were distributed privately simultaneously with money and/or food, although in unknown quantities.

Beijing Association of Pawnshop Dealers	359 pants (plus $302)	Soup Kitchen Provisioning Bureau	*Jiuzai zhoukan*, Nov. 7
Li Yufu, pooling money with ten other gold merchants	1,000 special-ordered sets	Refugees assembled at the charity cemetery grounds outside Yongding gate	*Xiao gongbao*, Nov. 19
Chen household outside Anding gate	800 new items	To nearby refugees on the 24th and 25th	*Zhongguo minbao*, Nov 26
Mother-Infant Relief Society (*Furu jiuji hui* 婦孺救濟會)	8,500 sets	Outside the group's offices inside Xizhi gate	*Chenbao*, Nov. 27
Cao Runtian and Deng Junxiang, local gentry (*gai qu shendong*)	$200 for thread	For poor students at a police-run half-day school to sew clothes for themselves.	*Zhongguo minbao*, Dec. 14
Relief Society of the Five Northern Provinces (*Beiwusheng zaiqu xieji hui* 北五省災區協濟會)	2,600 *tao* (sets) and 950 *jian* (items)	By rail to Beijing in December 1920	*Zhengfu gongbao*, June 13
Beijing Emergency Relief Society (*Zhengji jipin hui* 拯濟極貧會 or the Regional Disaster Relief Society *Jinji zhenzai hui* 近畿賑災會)	3,000 *jian* (items)	By rail to Beijing in December 1920	*Zhengfu gongbao*, June 13
Shandong, Hunan, Henan and Zhili Charity Relief Society of Shanghai (*Shanghai Lu Xiang Yu Zhi yizhen hui* 上海魯湘豫直義振會)	1,000 items	By rail to Beijing in December 1920	*Zhengfu gongbao*, June 13
Northern Provinces Emergency Relief Society (*Beisheng jizhen xiehui* 北省急振協會)	400 items	By rail to Beijing in December 1920	*Zhengfu gongbao*, June 13
Shunzhi Drought Relief Society (*Shunzhi hanzai jiuji hui* 順直旱災救濟會)	400 sets	By rail to Beijing in December 1920	*Zhengfu gongbao*, June 13
Beijing Winter Clothes Relief Society of Hankou (*Hankou chouban Beijing dongyi jiuji hui* 漢口籌辦北京冬衣救濟會)	5,000 items	By rail to Beijing in December 1920	*Zhengfu gongbao*, June 13
Capital Poor Relief Society (*Jingshi pinmin jiuji hui* 京師貧民救濟會)	4,000 sets	By rail to Beijing in December 1920	*Zhengfu gongbao*, June 13
Chinese Red Cross (*Hongshizi hui* 紅十字會)	4,000 items	By rail to Beijing, December 1920	*Zhengfu gongbao*, June 13
	1,700 sets	By rail to locations in greater Beijing, December 1920	*Zhengfu gongbao*, June 13
	300 items	Soup kitchen outside	*Aiguo baihua bao*,

		Desheng gate	Dec. 24
Chinese Red Cross, Hankou (*Hankou hongshizi hui* 漢口紅十字會)	2,440 items	By rail to unknown locations in greater Beijing, December 1920	*Zhengfu gongbao*, June 13
Peking United International Famine Relief Committee (*Guoji tongyi jiuji zonghui* 國際統一救災總會)	200 sets	By rail to unknown locations in greater Beijing, December 1920	*Zhengfu gongbao*, June 13
YMCA (Rice Market branch)	Unspecified amount of clothes	By car to four suburbs	*Chenbao*, Jan 5
Unnamed philanthropist (*cishan jia*)	Box of clothes, dropped off by motorcar	The poor amassed on curbside outside Pinze gate	*Beijing baihua bao*, Jan. 12
Society for Awakening Goodness (*Wushanshe* 悟善社)	1,600 articles	To the army *yamen* for its soldiers to distribute to the poor west of the city	*Chenbao*, Jan. 21

A cursory tally from news reports finds 39,749 items or sets of clothes distributed to the stricken by individuals and charities in 1920-21 Beijing. Official and extragovernmental clothes handouts in Beijing then amounted to upwards of 285,000 items or sets over the course of the crisis–equal to over one fourth of the entire population of Beijing. "To give an adult a suit of padded clothes costs approximately $2.75," Gamble noted in his study, which gives some idea of the overall monetary value of this collective endeavor.[108] Beijing authorities thus clearly took the lead in clothing distribution during the 1920-21 famine – a departure in fact from official policy under the Qing, which, at least according to the *Zhenji*, a major work of relief administration from the 1600s, had stipulated that gifts of clothing were "strictly a matter for private charity," in the words of Pierre-Étienne Will.[109] In this area, at least, the warlord administration of China'a capital in the early Republic took on a more active relief role than its Qing predecessor, clothing hundreds of thousands in the capital area alone, while projecting their clothes operations deep into the famine zone: in one case from February, 1921, Beijing's Government Relief Bureau

[108] Gamble, *Social Survey*, 282.
[109] Will, *Bureaucracy and Famine*, 139.

reportedly telegrammed the magistrates of "each" of Shandong's afflicted counties to appear at a provincial depot to acquire 20,000 items of clothing each for distribution in their districts.[110]

Lodging

As early as mid-August, municipal authorities had set up refugee shelters (*nanmin shourongsuo*) in greater Beijing for those fleeing the July war fought in the environs of the capital. In one reported case, 17 Gu'an County men, women and children arriving in the capital pleading for help from authorities were sent by gendarmerie commander Wang Huaiqing to one such facility outside Yongding gate.[111] A month later, with an estimated 3,000 refugees already in the environs of the capital feeling famine conditions in outlying counties, General Wang, apparently following instructions from Interior Minister Zhang Zhitan, ordered garrison commanders around the city to perform a headcount of refugees in their districts and report back to the *yamen* "in order to prepare for their reception (*yi bei shefa anzhi*)."[112] City authorities were soon setting up the fifty refugee shelters planned along with the opening of 60 soup kitchens around the capital region in October, as discussed above, which included four "warming shelters (*nuanchang*)" opened in mid-October by Wang's *yamen* in the four suburbs. With official shelters starting to fill up in October, Shen Shouchang, the manager of a coal firm outside the city's Xuanwu gate, donated 50,000 *jin* of coal to the *yamen* for their heating (an act performed directly to the poor later in the heart of winter when the manager of the Guangshenglong Coal Warehouse outside Dongzhi gate issued 10,000 *jin*-worth of tickets to families there in the eastern suburbs, each ticket redeemable for five-*jin* of coal).[113]

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[110] *Beijing baihua bao*, 5 Feb. 1921.
[111] *Xiao gongbao*, 17 Aug. 1920.
[112] *Shihua*, 16 Sept. 1920.
[113] *Chenbao*, 24 Sept. 1920. *Shihua*, 7 Oct. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 17 Oct. 1920. *Xiao minbao*, 28 Jan. 1921.

As refugees arrived in the area of Beijing over the course of the fall, news reports detailed the efforts of Beijing police downtown and gendarmes patrolling the suburbs to send them on to the various official shelters set up for the most part beyond the city walls. By order of the chief of police, refugees were not allowed to erect their own encampments, and were instead required to enter such facilities.[114] The scramble for sufficient and suitable space for settling down tens of thousands of men, women and children around the city involved Wang sending subordinates in early November to "empty mineral mines" in the four suburbs to scout out locations for shelter facilities, each with a planned 200 rooms of packed earth there. Within a few days, Wang had reportedly secured permission from the association of Beijing gold-dealers for the temporary use of its "charity grounds (*yidi*)" outside Yongding gate for the establishment of shelter facilities. With "not a few of the poor dying from the cold" in late November, and with existing shelters full to capacity, Wang added "warming shelters" outside eight city gates, presumably at some of the scouted sites above. With winter officially looming in mid-December and refugees continuing to pour into the city, the Interior Ministry sent out staffers to scout for locations for an additional eight shelters in the suburbs.[115]

At the start of the New Year, reports began appearing that official shelters had reached capacity, and patrolmen were at a lost of where to send refugees encountered in the streets.[116] Xiong Xiling's Beiwusheng relief society responded by opening five shelters of its own, one of which was the soup kitchen and shelter housing 1,000 refugees at the abandoned glass factory in the South City, a facility mentioned earlier.[117] General Jiang Yucheng's Society for Awakening Goodness, or *Wushanshe*, had set up four of its own 10-room warming shelters (*nuanchang*)

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[114] *Yishi bao*, 2 Oct. 1920. *Shihua*, 20 Oct. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 20 Oct. 1920. *Shihua*, 7 Nov. 1920. *Chenbao*, 25 Nov. 1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 20 Dec. 1920.
[115] *Chenbao*, 7 Nov. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 11 Nov. 1920. *Shihua*, 25 Nov. 1920. *Chenbao*, 21 Dec. 1920.
[116] *Chenbao*, 12 Jan. 1921. *Shihua*, 12 Jan. 1921.
[117] *Xiao gongbao*, 24 Dec. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 5 Jan. 1921.

outside four city gates in October. Other private shelters followed, such as one for refugee children run jointly by the Beijing YMCA and the Peking United International Famine Relief Committee, and another at the city's Diwang temple funded by a society of men pooling money by not entertaining (*yan ke*) or attending banquets (*qi yan*) until the spring harvest (this latter group appears to have been co-founded by Hu Shi, the influential philosopher and literary figure assisting John Dewey in his lecture tour of the country that year).[118] Shelters were opened by individuals, as well, such as a woman surnamed Bo who with $800 of her own capital responded to rising rents and burgeoning female homelessness by opening a non-profit "guesthouse for women (*nü xiao kedian*)" in September at the Temple of the Moon outside Pingze gate, its lodging fee a mere copper a night; in mid-October gentry Ma Yaotang gathered funds to establish a "poor shelter (*pinmin qiliusuo*)" at the city's Green Dragon Bridge, offering coal-heated rooms and tea, although no food (residents were to fetch food elsewhere in the daytime and return for night lodging); in Guajia village west of the capital gentry Yuan Baotian established three "temporary refugee shelters (*linshi qiliusuo*)" in his village, serving warm tea (but also no food); and as late as mid-March 1921 philanthropists (*cishan jia*) Wang Chunfu and Gong Weihan responded to the rising number of destitute on the capital's streets by establishing two shelters (*shouyangsuo*), one each for men and women.[119] (**Table 7** lists the refugee and poor shelters opened in 1920-21 finding their way into news briefs.)

In total, according to press reports that year, at least 25 state organs, charities or lone relief actors from the ranks of official, merchant, gentry and military circles opened at least 73 shelters in greater Beijing's nine-month stretch from the onset of famine in August 1920 to its

[118] The group, the *Jieyan zhenzai hui*, was co-founded in Beijing in October 1920 by Hu Shi, Xu Baohuang and Hu Jiageng. *Fengsheng*, 19 Oct. 1920. *Fengsheng*, 27 Oct. 1920. *Chenbao*, 1 Dec. 1920. *Yishi bao*, 2 Oct. 1920. *Chenbao*, 22 Oct. 1920.
[119] *Shihua*, 31 Aug. 1920. *Shihua*, 23 Oct. 1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 29 Nov. 1920. *Xiao minbao*, 22 March 1921.

waning in April 1921 in direct response to the humanitarian crisis, some with capacity for several thousand old and infirm refugees, orphan girls, children refugees, destitute men or women, or any combination thereof.

Table 7: Poor and refugee shelters opened in greater Beijing, 1920-21[120]

Initiator	Institution type/location	News source & date, 1920-21
Wang Pin'an	An old people's society (*laorenhui*) for older refugees planned for August at the West Pearl Market outside Nancheng, south suburbs	*Chenbao*, Aug. 1
Female philanthropist (*cishan jia*) surnamed Bo	A women's charity guesthouse (*nü xiaokedian*) planned for mid-September by the Temple of the Moon (*Yuetan*) outside Pingze gate	*Shihua*, Aug. 31
Buddhist Disaster Relief Society (*Fojiao jiuzaijihui* 佛教救災會)	Homes for refugee boys and girls (*ji'er shourongsuo*) "at several sites" on temple grounds (*siyuan*) in each of the capital suburbs	*Fengsheng*, Oct. 3
General Wang Huaiqing's *yamen*	Four refugee warming shelters (*nuanchang*) outside Fucheng, Desheng, Chaoyang, and Yongding gates	*Xiao gongbao*, Oct. 17
Society for Awakening Goodness (*Wushanshe* 悟善社)	Two 10-room warming shelters (*nuanchang*) outside Desheng and Yongding gates	*Fengsheng*, Oct. 19
Minister of Communications Ye Gongchu	Charity children's home (*shanyouyuan*) on Xiaonanjie inside Xizhi gate for eight months' duration	*Shihua*, Oct. 20
Municipal police	Sub-branch of downtown's poor shelter (*pinmin shouyangsuo*) for women at north Beijing's Thousand Buddha Temple (Qianfo si)	*Xiao gongbao*, Oct. 21
Banquet Funds Relief Society (*Jieyan zhenzai hui* 節宴賑災會)	Famine zone temporary boys and girls shelter (*zaiqu ertong linshi shouyangsuo*) at the city's Diwang Temple	*Chenbao*, Oct. 22
Gentryman Ma Yaotang	Poor shelter (*pinmin louliusuo*) at Qinglongqiao (Green Dragon Bridge)	*Shihua*, Oct. 23
Nanyang Brothers Tobacco Company	Refugee shelter (*shourongsuo*) with 1,000 capacity in Fengtai, south suburbs	*Zhongguo minbao*, Oct. 24
Society for Awakening Goodness (*Wushanshe* 悟善社)	Two 10-room warming shelters (*nuanchang*) outside Zuo'an and You'an gates	*Fengsheng*, Oct. 27

[120] This list excludes official shelters mentioned in passing in news articles.

Dong Shanting	Home for orphan girls (*gu nü yuan*) with handicrafts classes on Houmen dajie	*Chenbao*, Nov. 5
General Wang Huaiqing's *yamen*	Warming shelter (*nuanchang*) at Guangtong temple outside Xizhi gate	*Xiao gongbao*, Nov. 11
Lu Yi, philanthropist (*cishan jia*)	Home for disaster area children (*zaiqu ertong shouyangsuo*) at a temple in west Beijing	*Zhenzai ribao*, Nov. 13
Municipal police	Home for elderly refugees (*yanglaoyuan*) on west Beijing's Shibei *hutong*	*Chenbao,* Nov. 18
Zhang Jianqiao, philanthropist (*cishan jia*)	Plans a poor old people's home (*yang lao yuan*) in Houhai district	*Zhongguo minbao*, Nov. 9
Soup Kitchen Provisioning Bureau (*Zhouchang choubanchu*)	Shelter (*louliusuo*) at the Guangtong temple outside Xizhi gate	*Zhongguo minbao*, Nov. 20
General Wang Huaiqing's *yamen*	Eight warming shelters (*nuanchang*) outside Anding, Dongzhi, Chaoyang, Guangqu, Zuoan, Yongding, Guang'an and Xizhi gates to take in the homeless poor (*wudizhusu de pinmin*)	*Shihua*, Nov. 25
Buddhist Relief Aid Society (*Fojiao zhuzhen hui* 佛教助賑會)	Famine children's home (*ji'er shourongsuo*) at the Jile temple outside Xizhi gate	*Xiao gongbao*, Nov. 28
Gentryman Yuan Baotian	Three temporary refugee shelters (*linshi louliusuo*) in Guajia village west of Beijing	*Zhongguo minbao*, Nov. 29
Commoner Trade School (*Pinmin zhiye xuexiao* 平民職業學校)	Plans to open a shelter for refugee children (*zai'er shouyang suo*) in unspecified location	*Zhongguo minbao*, Nov. 29
Beijing YMCA and Peking United International Famine Relief Committee	Refugee children's shelter (*ciyou yuan*) inside Dong'an gate	*Chenbao*, Dec. 1
Dong Qiuyan, philanthropist (*da cishan jia*); unclear if this is the same man as Dong Shanting above	Orphan girls home (*gu nü yuan*) at Drum Tower West outside Di'an gate, teaching crafts, etc.	*Zhongguo minbao*, Dec. 7
Li Qingfang	Beijing refugee girl's shelter (*zaimin younü jiaoyang yuan*) operating at unspecified location and corresponding with chief Henan relief administrator (*zhenwu duban*) Zhang Fengtai	*Minyi ribao*, Dec. 11
Xiong Bingsan	North Capital Refugee Children's Temporary Shelter (*jingbei zaimin ertong linshi jiaoyangyuan*) at the Ministry of Communications Yunpei residence, capacity 250	*Zhongguo minbao*, Dec. 15
Interior Ministry	Announces plans to add eight refugee shelters (*nanmin shourongsuo*) in the suburbs	*Chenbao*, Dec. 21
Jiang Yucheng, chairman of the Capital Poor Relief Society (*Jingshi pinmin jiuji hui* 京師貧民救濟會)	Plans poor elderly and children's shelters (*yanglaotang*, *pin'eryuan*) and workhouses (*pinmin gongchang*)	*Xiao gongbao*, Dec. 23
Xiong Xiling's Beiwusheng relief	Warming shelter (*nuanchang*) and	*Xiao gongbao*, Dec. 24

society (*Beiwusheng zaiqu xieji hui* 北五省災區協濟會)	soup kitchen at shuttered glass factory outside Yiwu gate, capacity 1,000	& *Xiao gongbao*, Jan 5
Unnamed, but hires two YMCA members as managers	Disaster Zone Children's Temporary Shelter (*zaimin haitong linshi jiaoyangyuan*) on Langjia *hutong* in east Beijing, sends men to Zhili and Henan to fetch children refugees	*Minyi ribao*, Dec. 27 & *Shihua*, Dec. 29
Xiong Xiling's Beiwusheng relief society (*Beiwusheng zaiqu xieji hui* 北五省災區協濟會)	Expands warming shelters (*nuanchang*) to locations in four suburbs	*Xiao gongbao*, Jan. 5
Xiong Xiling's Charity Children's Home (*Ciyou yuan* 慈幼院) in west Beijing	Creates temporary refugee children's shelter (*beifang zaiqu ertong linshi shouyang yuan*) on Langjia *hutong*	*Yishi bao*, Jan. 7
Unnamed	Famine Children Shelter (*ji'er shourongsuo*) in Shanguang temple inside Guang'an gate	*Xiao minbao*, Jan. 22
Gentryman Wang Rongji	Home for orphan girls (*gu nü yuan*) in west suburbs outside Xizhi gate with classes in writing and handicrafts	*Xiao gongbao*, Jan. 26
Buddhist Relief Society (*Fojiao zhenji hui* 佛教賑濟會)'s Lian Hai, likely a monk	Escorts 150 small children (*xiaohai*) from the south Zhili famine field to the *Shanguosi* temple inside Guang'an gate	*Guobao*, 28 Jan. 1921.
Municipal police	Two additional foundling homes (*yuyingsuo*), one downtown, one in the suburbs	*Xiao gongbao*, Feb. 5
Liu Xilian	Plan to open temporary relief shelters for the weak and elderly (*linshi laoruo jiujiyuan*) at various locations in east Beijing	*Beijing baihuabao*, Feb. 14
Unnamed	Refugee children and women's shelter (*zaimin you nü jiaoyangyuan*) at the Xianzhong temple outside Di'an gate plans two additional branches downtown using borrowed space	*Shihua*, March 3
Wang Chunfu and Gong Weihan, philanthropists (*cishan jia*)	Men's homeless shelter (*nanchi shouyangsuo*) and women's homeless shelter (*nü chi shouyangsuo*) in unspecified Beijing locations	*Xiao minbao*, March 22

The sources rarely allow us to see clearly into the operation of these shelters, but the Beijing Christian Educational Press's *Shengming* magazine issued a curious report in the winter of 1921 that at least sheds light on perceptions at the time on the nature of Christian, Buddhist and official shelters (*shourongsuo*) – at least from the perspective of the missionary community.

Point by point, the piece contrasted shelters managed by the "Christian (*jiaohui*) community" from "Chinese methods (*Zhongguo fangmian*) of shelter management" along the following lines: Christian institutions admitted women, girls and boys, but, with the exception of the old and infirm, "exceedingly few" men, while making sure to separate the ages and sexes; Chinese, on the other had, took in men, women, old and young "without exception (*yilü*)," while mixing (*hunza*) them all. In Christian shelters, the report continued, 80 to 90 percent of residents were put to work on weaving and rugmaking, etc., and the majority of boys were schooled, as opposed to their Chinese counterparts in which work was not assigned "in the least (*haowu*)" and "absolutely no (*juedui meiyou*) education" was provided. Finally, in the former both children and adults were afforded "peace and comfort (*anle*)" and "sanitary conditons (*weisheng*)" while in the latter "extreme misery (*canku yichang*)" and filth prevailed. While clearly a form of propaganda, *Shengming*'s report should be taken more seriously because it cites as its basis an article on the subject published previously in the more sober national newspaper *Chenbao*, a report written by Chen Wanli, a 23 year old Jiangsu native and recent graduate of Beijing's public medical school, as well as a non-Christian, as *Shengming* made sure to point out.[121]

For its example of "Chinese" filth and disease, the *Shengming* report had used the example of an apparent inspection of the Buddhist Relief Society's shelter in Zhengding County, Zhili, which the group had opened on the 15th of October.[122] There is, unfortunately, little room here for an in depth examination of Buddhist and other facilities across the famine field, but it might be mentioned that reports on native-run shelters appear to contradict much of the Christian journal's exposé. For one, native shelters in many cases did divide men and women, a practice we see not only in some of the Beijing instititions listed above but also as far back as the 1870s

[121] Lin Hongfei, "Hanzai zhong de jidujiao, fojiao, he guanliao zhengke (Christianity, Buddhism and the political establishment amid the drought-disaster)," *Shengming*, 15 Feb. 1921. Xu, *Minguo renwu*, 1460.
[122] *Shihua*, 21 Oct. 1920.

in our discussion of Cang in the last chapter. And then while conditions were likely spartan if not filthy indeed in many famine refuges across the famine field, as the report charges, the Buddhist Relief Society had reportedly begun establishing shelters for up to 5,000 residents each in multiple sections of Zhil as early as September teaching basic medical skills (*yishu*), midwifery (*chanpo*) and handicrafts (*shougong*) in each, while the 200 children refugees in the Buddhist society's shelter inside Fucheng gate were reportedly taken on a walk around Beijing's western suburbs in "warming" late February weather in a bid to "liven up the kids' spirits (*yi huofa ertong zhi jingshen*)," hardly suggestive of indifference to the well-being of shelter residents.[123] Curiously, such parades around the city in good weather appeared to have been a common practice by Buddhist shelters in the city: 600 children refugees from a Buddhist shelter downtown exited the city and marched around the eastern suburbs a few days earlier in February, and in the middle of March, Zhang Qin, the manager of another Buddhist shelter, took 300 refugee children through the South City's Guang'an gate and wandered in "orderly fashion" through the western suburbs before re-entering the North City's Xizhi gate at nightfall and returning home, all for a little "exercise (*yundong*)."[124]

Workhouses

Rather than examining specific charges on the management of native shelters, then, we might broaden our discussion to the subject of the *social goals* behind these institutions. *Shengming*'s editors had clearly set out to draw a clear contrast between constructive or educative relief pursued by the Western-influenced Christian community and "unenlightened" native approaches. We will address the larger subject of work relief later in this study, but will

[123] *Zhongguo minbao*, 30 Sept. 1920. *Fengsheng*, 28 Feb. 1921. *Xiao minbao*, 28 Feb. 1921.
[124] *Chenbao*, 26 Feb. 1921. *Guobao*, 11 March 1921.

end this chapter with a look at the flurry of educational and employment activities associated with native housing for the resident poor and incoming refugees in 1920-21.

Soon after launching soup kitchen and shelter operations in the metropolitan region in the fall, gendarmerie commander Wang Huaiqing, Yin Hongshou, the police chief, and Wang Hu, chief administrator of the metropolitan region, decided to hire artisans (*yishi*) to teach trade skills to both male and female refugees coming into the hands of authorities at official shelters and soup kitchen facilities until April of 1921.[125] Facing tight budgets to accommodate incoming refugees, Wang Huaiqing also devised a plan in mid-September to have refugees arriving from the south make a living (*shengji*) by peddling well water around the city, requesting first that police officials scout out suitable locations for digging wells for the scheme along main roads.[126] Other employment projects for arriving refugees initiated by Wang included work on the city moat and meeting a deficit of 300 suburban patrolmen in November by hiring 237 able-bodied refugees at shelters around the city to join patrol squads as a way of providing relief (*yi dai zhenji*).[127] Soup kitchen provisioning bureau selected 2,000 attendees to do roadwork as work relief in the suburbs of the capital.[128] Similarly, later in November, a group called the Beijing work relief society (*gongzhen xiehui*) approached Wang Huaiqing and Yin Hongshou with a plan to recruit refugees at official soup kitchens and shelters around the city in order to find them employment as workers in local ironwork facilities (*tieju*).[129]

Private charities also added work or training dimensions to their relief activities around the capital. Bao Ruichen's Emergency Relief Society, or *Zhengji jipin hui*, raised a large sum of money (*jukuan*) in March 1921 to establish four poor workshops (*gongyichang*) in four parts of

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[125] *Shihua*, 24 Oct. 1920.
[126] *Yishi bao*, 15 Sept. 1920.
[127] *Shihua*, 19 Sept. 1920. *Shihua*, 28 Nov. 1920. *Chenbao*, 29 Nov. 1920.
[128] *Shihua*, 24 Oct. 1920.
[129] *Zhongguo minbao*, 20 Nov. 1920. *Zhenzai ribao*, 24 Nov. 1920.

the city in response to the large number of unemployed poor (*wuye pinmin*) in the capital area.[130] The following month a branch of the Capital Charity Society (*Jingshi cishan hui fenhui*) set up a home for the elderly (*yangjiyuan*) and workhouse for poor women (*funü gongzuo yuan*) outside Chongwen gate in light of the city's "swelling numbers of old and frail men and women fallen ill" and "jobless young women with no choice but to wait to die *(shushou dai bi*)."[131] (See **Table 8** for a list of workhouses established by charities in Beijing over the year.)

Table 8: Charity workhouses opened in greater Beijing, 1920-21

Initiator	Institution/location	Stated goal	News source & date, 1920-21
Major merchants (*jushang*)	Poor factory (*pinmin gongchang*) outside Desheng gate	Train and employ refugees begging in the streets	*Zhongguo minbao*, Oct 25
Lü Yi and like-minded people (*tongzhi*)	Refugee children trade-school (*zaiqu ertong linshi shouyangsuo*) in west Beijing	House and teach trade-skills to refugee children	*Shuntian shibao*, Oct. 28
Dong Shantang, philanthropist (*da cishan jia*)	Home for single women (*gunüyuan*) on Houmen Street	"Relieve supportless women (*jiuji wukao gunü*)" by offering classes in writing, handicrafts, etc.	*Chenbao*, Nov. 5
Philanthropists (*cishan jia*) and Qing historians (*taishi*) Wen Hai and a man surnamed Ke	Tianjin's Huaxin Textile Reeling (*fangsha*) Factory	Take 100 Beijing bannermen youths (*baqi youding*) as apprentices	*Zhongguo minbao*, Nov. 3
Society for Awakening Goodness (*Wushanshe* 悟善社)	Textile workshop in a rug factory outside Chongwen gate in the South City	Training 20 refugee children from the famine zone	*Zhongguo minbao*, Nov. 20
Zhang Wendou, manager of the Ruyicheng Rug Factory	Charity workhouse (*cishan gongchang*) on a *hutong* in Beijing's inside-left third district	Employ 110 poor children learning to make rugs, dye fabrics, etc.	*Yishi bao*, Dec. 7
Wang Meng'er and like-minded people (*tongzhi*) at a glass factory outside Qian gate	Charity workhouse (*cishan gongchang*)	Employ the local poor	*Xiao gongbao*, Dec. 2
Dong Qiuyan, philanthropist (*cishan jia*)	Home for single women (*gunüyuan*) in the Houhai district	Offer classes in writing, handicrafts, etc.	*Chenbao*, Dec. 7

[130] *Shihua*, 20 March 1921.
[131] *Guobao*, 20 April 1921.

Shu Bingdiao and like-minded people (*tongzhi*)	Poor assistance workhouse (*liji gongchang*) on Zhaofu street outside Di'an gate	Teach metalwork, dyeing, carpentry, and weaving to the "helpless (*wugao*)" poor	*Chenbao*, Dec. 14
Unnamed	Famine relief simple workhouse (*zhenzai jianyi gongchang*) at the western leather market	Take in 50 refugee children from Zhili's Jiaohe County for apprenticeships	*Chenbao*, Jan. 14
Wang Yinchuan	Half-day poor workhouse (*pinmin banri gongchang*) in the city, financed with $10,000	Admit 200 of the poor to learn carpentry, soap and towel making, etc., in the morning, selling their work on the streets in the afternoon	*Shihua*, Jan. 20
Wang Rongji, gentryman (*shenshi*)	Home for single women (*gunüyuan*) outside Xizhi gate in the western suburbs	Teach writing and handicrafts to "suffering women who are alone"	*Guobao*, Jan. 26
Liang Shiyi's North China Relief Society (*Huabei jiuzai xiehui* 華北救災協會)	School for orphan boys and girls on the main street inside Xizhi gate, financed with $10,000	Teaching reading and trade skills to boys were aged 8-15, girls 8-10	*Jiuzai zhoukan*, Jan. 30
Bao Ruichen's Emergency Relief Society (*Zhengji jipin hui* 拯濟極貧會)	Four poor workshops (*gongyichang*) in four parts of the city	Hire the unemployed poor (*wuye pinmin*)	*Shihua*, March 20
Yao Chengzhang, "citizen (*gongmin*)" and "like-minded people (*tongzhi*)"	Commoner workshop (*pingmin gongchang*) west Beijing	Admit poor boys to learn trades	*Guobao*, 22 March
Society for Awakening Goodness (*Wushanshe* 悟善社)	Textile workshop for the poor (*pinmin gongchang*) at the Xiaoyaomiao temple on Dongzhimen street in the North City	Teaching local poor children	*Chenbao*, April 8
Branch of the Capital Charity Society (*Jingshi cishan hui fenhui* 京師慈善會分會)	Home for the elderly (*yangjiyuan*) and workhouse for poor women (*funü gongzuo yuan*) outside Chongwen gate	Meet the need of "swelling numbers of old and frail men and women fallen ill" and "jobless young women with no choice but to wait to die (*shushou dai bi*)."	*Guobao*, April 20

In her study of indigence in urban China in the first half of the 20th century, Janet Chen has positioned this surge in popularity of workhouses in Beijing and elsewhere in an intellectual climate in which sociologists increasingly viewed poverty as a social disease injurious to the

nation and in need of reform, by force if necessary. More, "The growing enthusiasm for workhouses in the early twentieth century," Chen writes, "paralleled simultaneous attempts to eliminate outdoor relief in favor of detention and labor."[132] Consistent with Chen's study, public and private poor workhouses were established over our famine year not only in the capital but in cities as far flung as Changchun, Mukden, Yingkou, Hankou, and Tianjin, some to employ refugees, others for the resident poor, or both.[133]

The varied news sources announcing the creation of these workhouses in greater Beijing in 1920-21, however, did not in fact suggest any singular rationale or social vision behind their establishment. There is of course the possibility that the wire service writers putting out much of the news copy appearing in city papers in 1920-21 did not accurately reflect the motivations of their news subjects; still, if any reasoning came through in stories on workhouses it was conveyed in emotional terms such as how the "distress (*kunku*)" of certain people was "worthy of pity (*kanlian*)," or how existing efforts were lamentably "not enough to save (*bu zu wanjiu*)" them, requiring an intervention by a stranger.[134]

An article at the outset of our famine from Beijing's *Minsheng yuekan* magazine describing the establishment of a poor workhouse west of Beijing couched the project's creation in similary emotional terms. With many "hard-up people (*zhai ren*)" in the district "calling on heaven and striking their heads on the ground in grief (*hu tian qiang di*)," the article began, "middle-aged and older men (*xiansheng laoye*)" passing by – presumably referring to the four named initiators of the institution – "could not bear to see (*kanzhe shi shen bukan*)" such sights and were subsequently "moved to come to the rescue (*gu wo zaoyou wanjiu zhi xin*)" of such

[132] Chen, "Guilty of Indigence," 44.
[133] *Shihua*, 5 Sept. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 9 Sept. 1920. *Tianjin zhongmei ribao*, 15 Sept. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 10 Oct. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 30 Oct. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 10 Nov. 1920. *Hankou zhongxi bao*, 19 Jan. 1921. *Da gongbao*, 20 Jan. 1921. *Yuandong bao*, 2 Feb. 1921. *Yuandong bao*, 19 Feb. 1921.
[134] These common examples are pulled from *Chenbao*, 2 Dec. 1920. *Guobao*, 26 Jan. 1921.

people. The four men then donated $100 each as seed money for the creation of a charity workshop for the poor (*pinmin cishan gongchang*) in August 1920 in the western suburbs with the "primary aim *(zongzhi*) of rescuing these poor folk (*wanjiu pinmin*) by providing them with trades." The founders would work with local merchant-gentry for continued financial support, estimating that $2,000 could support (*yang*) 30 people, $20,000 could support 300 people, and $50,000-60,000 could support all the poor of the district (*xi xiao yidai pinmin*) as well as "protect and prevent the suffering of its bannermen families (*ke bao qimin yi bu shoukun ye*)."[135]

On the whole, Beijing workhouses in 1920-21 did not appear to be intended as replacements for the free outdoor relief, both official and private, examined earlier in this chapter. Indeed, over the year, some charities like the Buddhist Relief Society or General Jiang Yucheng's *Wushanshe* performed both free and work relief, or opened both "warming shelters" from the cold and workhouses for the poor. This is not to say that there was no "ideology under the loose rubric of 'social relief' (*shenhui jiuji*)," as Janet Chen describes it, brewing among influential intellectuals and policymakers in the year leading to the rise of the Nationalist regime in 1928. Rather, this chapter has endeavored to show that relief in 1920-21 Beijing was too diverse and multi-layered for any ideological camp to dominate its story just yet.

The generals

"Striving for the well-being of poor children (*mouqiu pin'er xingfu)*," ran a November 1920 headline in *Beijing baihua bao*. General Wang Huaiqing had set up five schools for poor children (*pin'er xuexiao*) in the suburbs, with all uniforms and board (*shanfei*) covered by his office, and graduation for each pupil in three years after learning trade-skills (*xueyi*) and military

[135] The named men are Shi Liansan, Lü Zuochen, Li Yingzhou, and Ning Zunsan. *Minsheng yuekan*, 10 Aug. 1920.

training (*dangbing*).[136] The act was one of many over the years for which the commandant of the city's gendarmerie was credited.

In January 1921, Liang Shiyi's North China Relief Society devoted $10,000 to the creation of a literacy and trade school for orphan boys and girls on the main street inside Xizhi gate, selecting 100 children from greater Beijing and another 100 from the famine zone. In the school, boys aged 8 to 15 and girls 8 to 10 would follow a curriculum of shoemaking, carpentry, textile spinning and weaving, and sewing, as well as arithmetic, penmanship, literature (*guowen*) and sports (*tiyu*). Continuing a relationship with the society (the group had donated $100,000 to his *yamen*'s soup kitchen operations in the fall), Wang Huaiqing instructed each of the 16 to 20 district garrisons rining the city to select 15 orphans for admission into the school, expenses covered, it appears, by Wang's *yamen*.[137] Early the next year, Wang, a native of Ningjin County, was reportedly moved by thoughts of his native region when encountering 27 refugee children from Daming Prefecture in the extreme south of Zhili while inspecting refugee shelters run by his system of garrisons in the suburbs. He promptly had the youths admitted to a school on Beijing's Mao'er *hutong*, their expenses and the teachers' salary covered by him.[138]

Pieced together with Wang's micro-managing of much relief activity in greater Beijing over the year, these paternalistic acts produce a very different composite picture than one that might be expected of a high-level figure in the country's military administration in 1920. That they served as public relations there is no doubt, but the very fact that a "warlord" figure devoted considerable amount of his time to such matters is noteworthy in itself.[139] As to Wang's personal

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[136] *Beijing baihua bao*, 17 Nov. 1920.
[137] *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 30 Jan. 1921. *Xiao minbao*, 28 Jan. 1921.
[138] *Shihua*, 8 Jan. 1920.
[139] Alfred H. Y. Lin has made this point regarding 1930s Guangzhou. Alfred H. Y. Lin, "Warlord, Social Welfare and Philanthropy: The Case of Guangzhou under Chen Jitang, 1929-1936," *Modern China*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (April 2004), 151-98.

motivation and reasoning, the sources do not say, beyond vague references to pity for the poor or thoughts of his native-place. What we can address here, though, is the degree to which propaganda for the regime was driving these reports in the press over the year.

The tabloids *Beijing baihua bao*, which reported the first of the anecdotes above, had a strikingly similar plain layout to other city tabloids heavily used in our study like *Xiao gongbao* and *Aiguo baihua bao*, suggesting that they were published by one of the many political factions in the city, some allied with the regime. *Yishi bao*, or "Social Welfare," on the other hand, was north China's largest daily with Tianjin and Beijing editions and a combined daily circulation of 25,000. In late February of 1921, "Commandant takes pity on the poor (*tongling tixu pinmin*)" was the headline on the first story in the paper's city section. "Fearing that any poor falling ill and seeking lodging in guesthouses (*xiaodian*) might be denied admission," the paper reported, "or that any who contracted illness inside were driven out (*quzhu*)," General Wang Huaiqing issued orders to all garrisons ringing the city to convey to inn managers that such actions were strictly forbidden (*jinzhi*). "Instead," the report continued, "authorities would cover (*you guan fagei*) the room and board charges incurred by all poor lodgers who had fallen ill (*fan you pinmin huandu zhe*)," as well as the cost of coffins and burial for poor lodgers who died.[140]

The story itself is remarkable, but as significant was the fact that *Yishi bao* in 1920 had been edited by Xu Qian (aka George Chien Hsu), a close ally of Sun Yat-sen belonging to "the new type of 'Christian Statesman," according to his entry in the 1920 edition of *Who's Who in China*, having written "several brochures in English and Chinese upon the relation of Christianity to the National salvation of China." "Mr. Hsu states that his editorial policy will be

[140] A similar report appeared the following day in *Shihua*. "Out of respect for the lives of the people (*yi zhong minming*)," it read, Wang Huanqing had "prohibited (*buzhun*) guesthouse managers around the city from intentionally creating difficulties (*guyi diaonan*)" for lodgers. Anyone "thrown out of guesthouses into the cold to starve or freeze to death because they could not pay his bill would have their debts covered by authorities (*guanting daichang*)." *Yishi bao*, 28 Feb. 1921. *Shihua*, 1 March 1921.

directed toward the abolition of the Tuchanate system," the entry continues, referring to the system of military governors, or *dujun*, "and the establishment of the government on a constructive and constitutional basis."[141] There was no apparent reason then for Xu's paper to run stories burnishing the character of Wang Huaiqing or the Beiyang regime. For all the political jousting and intrigue plaguing the early Republic, it appears that press coverage of charity, even famine relief in 1920-21, transcended politics. (The politics of culture, on other other hand, is a different matter, as we will see in our final chapter.)

This brings us finally to our second major charity figure from the ranks of the Beiyang military establishment, General Jiang Yucheng, head of the Yellow Bannerman in 1920, as well as of the Grain Relief Society, *Wushanshe*, and City Poor Relief Society (*Jingshi pinmin jiuji hui*), as we have seen, and an honorary trustee (*mingyu dongshi*) of the Beijing Poor Children's Shelter (*pin'eryuan*) at the city's Thousand Buddha temple (*Qianfosi*).[142] Beyond its shelters, and relief handouts, and operations in the famine field, such as in Cang County, the *Wushanshe* also got involved in the workhouse movement, setting up a modest textile workshop in a rug factory outside Chongwen gate in the South City in November to train 20 refugee children from the famine zone.[143] Later, in 1921, the group set up another textile workshop for the poor (*pinmin gongchang*) at the Xiaoyaomiao temple on Dongzhimen street in the North City, selecting apprentices from the half-day schools for poor children (*pin'er banri xuexiao*) that had beet set up by police in each district of the city earlier in January.[144]

But, during our famine year, Jiang initiated an additional type of relief organ serving the poor of the city as well, launching a charity bank (*cishan yinhang*) in early 1921 dedicated to

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[141] In November 1920 Xu had taken a position in the military government of Guangdong. Powell and Tong, eds., *Who's Who in* China, 68-70. Xu, *Minguo renwu*, 1201.
[142] *Shanbao*, March 1919.
[143] *Zhongguo minbao*, 20 Nov. 1920.
[144] *Chenbao*, 13 Jan. 1920. *Chenbao*, 8 April 1921.

"assisting families without means (*wuli*)" with micro-loans designed to help them "make a living (*mousheng shengji*)." Police had informed poor households in their districts throughout the city of the service, open ten to noon everyday outside Qian gate in the South City, and "recently the poor," of whom nothing was required to receive a loan apart from a guarantee from a shopkeeper (*pubao*), "had come to the bank in an endless stream (*fenfen bujue*)." Applicants could borrow $1, with no interest, and repay in four installments over a limit of 14 days, after which, if their debts were cleared, they could borrow again up to a maximum of $10.[145] Around the same time, a report appeared on a similar effort by a branch of Jiang's *Wushanshe*. On the 16th of January, members of the society's branch on the main street outside Xuanwu gate joined with the official in charge (*shuzhang*) of Beijing's Inner-left third district (*neizuo sanqu*) to open a poor loan bureau near Desheng gate (*pinmin cuoben chu*), reportedly in response to rampant unemployment (*shiye*) among the poor there.[146] While the particular report did not specify the conditions of the group's loan services, other news reports over the year indicate that Jiang and his *Wushanshe* were adding their efforts to yet another vehicle of relief so far largely left out of the story of Republican Beijing: micro-lending to the poor.

Another poor loan bureau was announced at the outset of famine in September, located inside the local bureau for agricultural and forestry skills (*nonglin chuanxi suo*). The loan office, started on the 12th of the month by gentryman (*shanshi*) Tao Enzhang, was meant to serve the destitute of a specifically delineated stretch of the city's western suburbs. "All small peddlers without money" could reportedly take out loans there "interest-free." Within days, the bureau was so overloaded with applicants that it was seeking subsidies (*buzhu*) from the municipality

[145] Curiously, Jiang is named only in the *Guobao* report; in all others the founder of this bank is identified only as a "major philanthropist (*da cishan jia*)." *Xiao gongbao*, 14 Jan 1921. *Beijing baihua bao*, 14 Jan. 1921. *Chenbao*, 14 Jan. 1921. *Shihua*, 14 Jan. 1921. *Guobao*, 15 Jan. 1921. *Shihua*, 30 Jan. 1921.
[146] *Beijing baihua bao*, 18 Jan. 1921.

(*shizheng gongsuo*).[147] Other poor loan bureaus appeared in the press over the year, one run out of a fire god temple (*huoshenmiao*), another by a middle school inside Xizhi gate, the latter also issuing loans without interest.[148] In addition to its garment and grain distributions mentioned above, Beijing's Poor Relief Society (*Jingshi pinmin jiuji hui*) reportedly set aside $2,500 in early January 1921 to make loans to small peddlers out of what it called a temporary credit office (*linshi daizhu chu*).[149] Lastly, an emergency loan bureau (*jieben zhouji suo*) organized by Zhou Ziqi with $10,000 to lend out existed in three locations around the city in late January – inside an east Beijing temple, a downtown liquor and vinegar office (*jiu cu ju*), and on a west Beijing *hutong* – where anyone with a guarantor (*bao ren*) could borrow 100 to 500 coppers with no interest if repayments were made within 100 days.[150] (Curiously, "in order to benefit the city's poor (*yin bianli pinmin qijian*)," municipal police reportedly issued a ban in early February on the closing (*xieye*) of pawnshops across the city for the lunar New Year holiday so that credit remained available through the hard winter ahead, although it is unclear if or how this was enforced.[151])

Closing

"Beijing was famous in the 1920s not only for its venal politicians, rapacious warlords, job-hunting officials, and idealistic students," David Strand writes in his study of the Chinese capital, "but also for its courteous but insistent policemen, rancorous mule drivers and night-soil carriers, polite but status-conscious shopkeepers, officious streetcar conductors, and artful

[147] *Aiguo baihua bao*, 10 Sept. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 14 Sept. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 21 Sept. 1920.
[148] *Zhenzai ribao*, 11 Nov 1920. *Shihua*, 8 Jan. 1921.
[149] *Xiao minbao*, 23 Jan. 1921.
[150] Borrowers of 100 coppers had to repay one copper a day during the loan period, borrowers of 200 coppers had to repay two coppers a day, and so on. It is unclear for how long such bureaus existed but one report dates one from September 1918. *Beijing baihua bao*, 26 Jan. 1921. *Shuntian shibao*, 4 Sept. 1920.
[151] *Shihua*, 1 Feb. 1921.

pickpockets." "Beijing in the Republican period was not only a city of warlords, protesting students, and literary figures," Madeleine Yue Dong appears to respond in her later work on the same time and place, "but also a city of storytellers, wrestlers, snack vendors, and landscape architects."[152] The findings in this chapter suggest that, on top of these earlier studies, the philanthropist, or *cishan jia*, might be added to Beijing's array of social types in the early Republic, one that regularly appeared, named or anonymous, in the local news pages over the course of the 1920-21 crisis year.

The charity and poor relief phenomena occurring in the streets of Beijing in the early 20th century are worth exploring in our larger discussion of famine because they did not stem from an altogether different social-cultural context than what existed in the rural famine zone. Despite being the capital under the Qing and in the early Republic, Beijing, which was minimally industrialized until 1949, remained in many ways a cluster of communities in the 1920s and was a more representative Chinese city than Tianjin and Shanghai, its treaty-port counterparts. As Myron Cohen has pointed out, Chinese society in general during the Qing was marked by fluid cultural and social relationships between town and country – what he calls the "late imperial context of rural-urban interpenetration and integration" – and there is no *cultural* reason why the intensity of voluntary poor-relief activity evident in Beijing *hutong* over 1920-21 could not have played out, if resources allowed for it of course, elsewhere in the famine field.[153] Finally, it should also be borne in mind that many of these charitable figures mobilizing money for poor and refugee relief were, paradoxically, members of the same "warlord" establishment that would soon take the nation down the path of incessant warfare. In fact, in some areas such as the free distribution of winter clothes – and possibly the door-to-door delivery of foodstuffs to the city's

[152] Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing*, 15. Dong, *Republican Beijing*, 8.
[153] Cohen, "Cultural and Political Inventions in Modern China," 161.

poor – the Beiyang regime seated in China's capital in 1920-21 appears to have outdone its Qing predecessor.

Chapter Four

The Exodus: refugee reception beyond the famine zone in 1920

In late September 1920, men from the garrison outside Beijing's Guang'an gate fired up several cauldrons and began cooking up congee. In light of the looming famine, their commander, gendarmerie chief Wang Huaiqing, had already launched plans to open dozens of soup kitchens in early autumn with his counterparts in the police and metropolitan administration, but these annual services for the poor would only run during the day. The garrison soldiers worked instead in the dead of night to feed 130 refugees camped out in their district. Having just arrived by train from famine-ravaged Hejian Prefecture in central Zhili, the men and women would not stay long – only a few hours – and, rested and fed, were off early in the morning for Suiyuan and Guihua in today's Inner Mongolia, where they intended to seek out a living (*mousheng*).[1] On two main rail lines to points north of the Great Wall, Beijing was not only a key destination for refugees seeking the aid of relatives, strangers or the municipality, the capital was also a major transit point for Henan and Zhili refugees passing through to greener districts to the North, and meeting the housing, food, or clothing needs amid the flow of refugees occupied a significant amount of official and charitable attention over the course of the crisis. A few weeks after the Hejian refugees passed through the city, for example, those passing north through Beijing with children could deposit them at a transit shelter set up by the Ministry of Communications leadership near Beijing's main rail station at Xizhi gate so older relatives venturing into the cold north of the Great Wall could return for them in the spring.[2]

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[1] *Shihua*, 30 Sept. 1920. A description of a similar garrison operation in Beijing at the other end of the crisis appears in *Chenbao*, 24 March 1921.

[2] Established in mid-October by Ye Gongchuo, who as head of the Ministry of Communications was in charge of the country's rail network, the facility would operate for eight months for boys 6-15 years old and girls 6-12 year old.

Farmers and other rural residents without the means to survive the winter of 1920-21, some having sold off the rafters to their homes for food, others their children, fled in all directions from their barren fields starting in summer. Some spread into fertile parts of Shanxi or south Henan, in some cases staying with relatives, simply begging for food, or growing robust crops like peanuts or sweet potatoes on low-grade land such as dry river beds lying "up-for-grabs" on the margins of communities.[3] Fleeing by cart, boat or train to urban areas such as Tianjin or, as we saw in the last chapter, Beijing, some stayed while others moved on further north to the steppes beyond the Great Wall or the forested expanse in the Northeast. Many would return home in spring when conditions improved. Well over a million, though, would leave their home districts for good, the vast majority of them to the Northeast. The fact that refugees from Zhili and Shandong, in particular, chose the edge of Siberia in the dead of winter 1920-21 instead of the warmer but more crowded rice-growing regions of the south showed the enduring power of a migratory pattern established as early as the first decades of the Qing. In times of crisis since the late 1600s, heads of households moved their entire families – male and female, old and young – over the same paths tread by able-bodied males on the off-season of "normal" years seeking temporary work in southern parts of the Northeast. Southern Manchuria (Fengtian) "had been an immigration area since the beginning of the (Manchu Qing) dynasty," Pierre-Étienne Will explains, citing on research by Amagai Kenzaburo. "Immigration was encouraged until 1688, tacitly tolerated until 1740, and continued thereafter despite restrictions that, although quite severe in principle, were easily relaxed whenever a calamity struck North China."[4]

Several weeks after the opening of the shelter, with increasing numbers of underclothed infants arriving at the station, a Ministry official sent a staffer to buy fifty sets of cotton baby clothing for arriving refugees. Considering the sheer numbers of refugees in transit, this single facility could have benefited only a small fraction of children passing through the capital. *Shihua*, 20 Oct. 1920. *Minyi ribao*, 6 Nov. 1920.

[3] Thaxton, *Salt of the Earth*, 249-50.

[4] Will, *Bureaucracy and Famine*, 45.

Somewhere between five and 7.5 percent of the year's afflicted – some 1,500,000 emigrants out of 20 to 30 million victims across north China[5] – were taken in, at least temporarily, by communities in the Northeast alone, suggesting that both freedom of movement (often at official expense) and official and charitable relief of refugees in neighboring districts and provinces were major factors in the year's relatively modest mortality. It should be mentioned that this will be a very different chapter from our last, in which a high concentration of extant sources allowed us to detail multiple aspects of poor relief in a city of roughly one million residents. This chapter will instead only sketch four months in 1920 over which the equivalent of the entire population of Beijing moved from the drought zone into the Northeast alone, while hundreds of thousands ventured elsewhere in China.

Up until the 1949 establishment of the People's Republic, the phenomenon of migration away from disaster by Chinese was as proverbial as R. H. Tawney's famous depiction of the peasant-farmer as "a man standing permanently up to the neck in water, so that even a ripple is sufficient to drown him."[6] Yet, while the ubiquity of refugees in modern China has led to their inevitable appearance in narratives of urban history and warfare,[7] little light has been shed by the literature – including studies of famine relief [8] – on the communities lying along the refugee trail.

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[5] This is a very rough estimate. Cao Shuji puts the average immigration into Heilongjiang during the period 1918-22 at 141,000 and into Fengtian at 170,000 from 1912-21, while the official numbers for Jilin are considerably smaller. News reports out of Harbin at the end of 1920, however, put the official count of famine refugees already arrived in these three provinces at one million, a huge jump compared to other years. (Spread over the five months since the first talk of famine in August, this would have averaged 6,666 migrants a day into the Northeast, by train, boat, or foot, a feasible amount.) Of course, many might have returned south afterwards, yet they would have been replaced by several hundred thousand migrants to Heilongjiang in the spring, as we will see in our next chapter, leaving the total for the year well above average for the period. Cao Shuji, *Zhongguo yimin shi* (A history of migrants in China) Vol. 6 (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chuban she, 1997), 505-8. *Yuandong bao*, 30 Dec. 1920.

[6] R. H. Tawney, *Land and Labour in China* (London: George Allen, 1932), 77.

[7] Refugee reception during the Second World War, especially in the area of Shanghai, has been of particular interest to historians recently. See Janet Chen, "Guilty of Indigence," 166-226. Nara Dillon, "The Politics of Philanthropy," 179-205.

[8] Pierre-Étienne Will offers an interesting but brief chapter on "Vagrancy" in his study of state relief in 18th century Zhili, while migration is largely tangential in Lillian Li's work. Will, *Bureaucracy and Famine*, 38-49. Li, *Fighting Famine*, 234.

This chapter aims then to provide a more holistic study of one of the greatest humanitarian crises to befall the Republic by charting in real time the relief contributions that communities as far flung as Zhangjiakou (Kalgan), Changchun and Harbin *dispatched* to the distant famine zone just as afflicted compatriots flooded into their midst. "Vagrant" populations have long been a source of fear and suspicion by China's ruling establishment and rural communities through which they passed, so this chapter also aims to explore how desperate strangers were *received* in places during a period of increasing turmoil a mere nine years after the fall of the Qing. While movement between the provinces and into major cities over the course of the 1920-21 crisis was at times restricted or barred, it was, as we will see, on the whole free-flowing and subsidized by various levels of the state. It should be borne in mind that migrants in 1920-21 were passing between the domains of what were increasingly autonomous military regimes – Cao Kun's Beiyang regime and that of Zhang Zuolin based in Fengtian, which were less than two years away from going to war with the other. The degree of official coordination over the transfer of refugees and relief goods in 1920-21 from the highest levels of government down to county magistrates and district officials is then noteworthy, if not remarkable.

Hankou

One of the more obvious destinations for refugees able to move along the main rail line running south of Beijing through south Zhili and the stricken north of Henan was the commercial hub of Hankou. In late September, Beijing-Hankou railroad officials announced that they were adding railcars to convey refugees to Hubei and down to points beyond until the end of October, a free southward movement that was extended repeatedly through the fall; in early December, the Ministry of Communications instructed all station managers to extend the movement of

refugees passing through their districts free of charge for yet another month.[9] We can get an idea of the reception of arriving refugees in this major Hubei urban community on the upper Yangzi on one day in early November from a report in the local press: Of several hundred Henan child refugees arriving in the early morning of November 1st (brought by whom the report does not say), half were taken in by the Peixintang (Cultivate the Heart) benevolence hall, the other half by the city's charity society (*cishan hui*), headed by Cai Fuqing. The latter group reportedly provided each child with three *mantou*, or steamed buns, a day, as would the Hall for a short period before sending the children on to the care of Cai's charity. (Within an hour of the children's arrival, 53 other newly-arrived refugees settled on the front steps of a government office, where a man named Hou Xiaoding distributed thirty *diao*, or 3,000 coppers, to them, evidently in a nonofficial capacity.)[10]

Hankou's charity society, which had a staff of thirty in 1920, had formed several years before the famine from among various social circles (*ge jie*) in the city with initial funding from the president of the Republic, Hubei's military and civilian governors, and official and merchant circles. "Several ten thousands" of silver dollars had been expended on construction in recent years, according to a profile of the group appearing in the fall of 1920, including an orphanage, a factory employing the maimed (*canfei*), and a hospital using Chinese and Western medicine treating several hundred patients daily. The facilities used $10,000 gold in operating expenses annually. Other monthly services by the group included providing coffins and proper burial to the poor, funding a commoner school, caring for the sick, feeding orphans, establishing a life boat (*jiusheng hongchuan*) service on the Yangzi, managing winter relief distribution of clothes and grain, financing the return home of refugees, and providing assistance to households struck

[9] *Da gongbao*, 29 Sept. 1920. *Chenbao*, 2 Dec. 1920.
[10] *Da hanbao*, 2 Nov. 1920.

by fire, long a common affliction in the city. Some of these activities, namely burial and lifeboat services (a main transshipment center, the city harbor had as many as 10,000 boats in the mid-19th century), were included in the founding aims of the earliest benevolence halls to appear in the area of Hankou at the beginning of the 19th century.[11] The charity society's primary source of funding in 1920 was monthly contributions by city merchants; secondary sources came from shipping and ferry companies applying surcharges to tickets.[12] In mid-September 1920, the society launched fundraising for the famine crisis at a meeting at which 137,000 *diao* (or 13,700,000 coppers, enough to buy 2,740,000 *jin* of grain at pingtiao centers) were donated by twelve men, plus 1,000 *bao*, or 160,000 *jin*, of bran.[13]

Within a month, the charity society acquired bolts of cotton fabric and hired seamstresses to produce clothes for distribution to the city's poor.[14] That same week, due to the ravages wreaked by soldiers in parts of Hubei and the refugees "streaming in" from the North, the Peixin Benevolence Hall on Hankou's Hongyi Lane hosted a meeting of members of nine other Hankou benevolence halls where they launched fundraising for their annual winter relief efforts, and decided to move up the date of distribution in light of the famine crisis.[15] The Dachang Cigarette Company funded the establishment of four soup kitchens in the city, joint-managed by the Winter Relief Affairs Bureau (*dongzhen shiwu suo*) for two winter months.[16] One news article providing figures on a charity effort by the Hankou police chief and twenty officers reports that

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[11] Rowe, *Hankow*, 107, 125.
[12] *Hankou zhongxi bao*, 9 Nov. 1920. *Da hanbao*, 20 Dec. 1920.
[13] *Hankou xinwen bao*, 18 Sept. 1920.
[14] *Da hanbao*, 5 Dec. 1920.
[15] These halls, or *shantang*, were the Anshan, Congshan, Yuanshan, Leshan, Ciji, Puhua, Daoxin, Congren, Dunren and Peixin. William Rowe relates that salt merchants in neighboring Hanyang city founded the area's first benevolence hall in 1823, and that a charity hall, providing such services as lifeboats on the Yangzi and burial, was formed by a broader array of merchants in 1830 Hankou. The city had at least 35 benevolence halls by 1895, many endowed with cultivatable and urban commercial property. *Hankou zhongxi bao*, 8 Dec. 1920. Rowe, *Hankow*, 107, 125.
[16] *Hankou zhongxi bao*, 4 Jan. 1921.

they committed "several thousand" *diao* (or strings of 1,000 cash) from their annual New Year banquet to poor and refugee relief.[17]

Most of the arriving refugees were in desperate shape, including two hundred men and women from Henan's Anyang and Luoyang who arrived in late December, heading to charity establishments and begging from storefronts; barely clothed, some offered up their children for sale and many were reportedly actively seeking to arrange the marriage of their daughters to men of local households.[18] Refugees also displayed a surprising amount of organized protest at their condition: early in the morning of December 27, several hundred refugees arrived by train from Henan, reportedly from Shandong; most in tattered clothes, the men and women split into groups of several dozen each, and each led by a leader, marched up and down city streets with red banners announcing their plight, appealing for food and cash at each major storefront. On the city's Huangpi Street, they reportedly held an "especially insistent demonstration" before authorities blocked them from continuing. At nightfall, strangers directed them to the above charity society.[19] As winter set in, corpses of refugees in batches of two or three appeared in places around the city, and either the city charity society or local police identified and handled the bodies until they could be claimed by kin.[20]

With the arrival of another 1,000 refugees at the end of December, the municipal authorities of Wuchang and Hankou cities (which have since combined with Hanyang to form Wuhan) convened with their respective chambers of commerce and the above charity society to discuss how to accommodate their swelling numbers, which had reached around 40,000 by the New Year. With overcast skies and rainfall for days, military and police authorities, fearing

[17] *Hankou zhongxi bao*, 16 Jan. 1921. *Hankou zhongxi bao*, 23 Jan. 1921.
[18] *Hankou zhongxi bao*, 13 Dec. 1920. *Hankou zhongxi bao*, 24 Dec. 1920.
[19] *Hankou zhongxi bao*, 28 Dec. 1920.
[20] *Hankou zhongxi bao*, 1 Dec. 1920. *Hankou zhongxi bao*, 4 Jan. 1921.

disorder, reportedly started barring refugees from entering the two twin cities, and wired their counterparts in the stricken provinces up north to cut off the inflow of refugees.[21] Earlier in December local officials in unnamed districts to the north of Hankou had reportedly barred trainloads of refugees from alighting in their districts, presumably out of fear of disease or of taking on the burden of their relief, leading to unknown numbers of deaths to the cold on idling trains.[22] However, the New Year appeared to be the first time refugees were barred from the major city of Hankou.

"No less than 30,000" Henan refugees were camped in Hankou city, the British consul wrote his superiors later that January, "housed in matsheds" and "fed by the native charitable societies with rice and congee," a style of shelter and relief furnished by elites in Hankou as far back as the 18th century, according to William Rowe. (It should be mentioned that these numbers of arriving bodies in distress were in fact normal compared to the city's 19th century experience when 30,000 came to the city each year in the 1880s during the months of high water in fall and winter. During the flood of 1848-49, 200,000 sought refuge in the well-stocked city, which was in the 19th century China's largest wholesale rice market.) Toward the end of January 1921, merchant-gentry from the city's winter relief (*dongzhen*) bureau brought in 40,000 *shi*, or 4.8 million *jin*, of Hunan rice for discount sale (*pingtiao*) to the public, an annual effort intensified later in the winter with the pressures the newcomers were putting on the city's food supply; surplus monies from the effort reportedly went to the relief of resident refugees.[23]

Greater Hankou also mobilized relief for the famine zone itself to the North, and this will only be sketched here. In the wake of Liang Shiyi's mid-September meeting in Beijing to

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[21] *Hankou zhongxi bao*, 30 Dec. 1920. *Hankou zhongxi bao*, 1 Jan. 1921. *Da hanbao*, 31 Dec. 1920.
[22] *Hankou zhongxi bao*, 4 Dec. 1920.
[23] "Hankow Intelligence Report, December Quarter, 1920," 24 Jan. 1921, FO 228/3282/125. *Hankou zhongxi bao*, 29 Jan. 1921. Rowe, *Hankow*, 228-9.

organize the famine response by various social circles in the capital, Wuchang and Hankou merchant-gentry formed their own relief society, named the Relief Society for the Northern Provinces (*Beisheng yizhen hui*), on the 16th of September, after which the provincial military governor, Wang Zichun, convened with the heads of local chambers of commerce and charity groups to mobilize relief for the North.[24] The Wuhan YMCA and other smaller charities, such as the *Xiyushe*, were also reportedly raising money "day after day" for the famine zone, raising a reported $100,000 by mid-December, which would be distributed by YMCA officials in the famine zone after an investigation of needs there.[25] A larger group, the North China Relief Society of Hankou, or *Hankou Huabei jiuzai hui*, headed by Jiang Peilin, reportedly sent investigators to Zhengzhou at the start of October in Henan, the neighboring province to the north where the group was concentrating its efforts, and the vice-heads of the society, Shi Jinsheng and Wan Zesheng, were credited with raising $500,000 by early October. Later in December, the group's heads traveled personally to the famine zone to dispense relief, running into bandits obstructing the roads, according to one report, after which they appealed to the military governor for escorts.[26] Ministry of Communications records credit the group with sending 2,400,000 *jin* of grain to Anyang, in north Henan, in December, 1920, along with 4,100 sets of clothes to Handan, in south Zhili. The same source credits a group called the Beijing Winter Clothes Relief Society of Hankou, or *Hankou chouban Beijing dongyi jiuji hui*, with sending 5,000 items of clothing to Beijing, and the Hankou branch of the Chinese Red Cross with 2,440 items of clothing to Beijing and 24 tons, or 40,320 *jin*, of grain to Tianjin, all in the same month of December.[27]

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[24] *Hankou xinwen bao*, 18 Sept. 1920. *Hankou zhongxi bao*, 1 Nov. 1920.
[25] *Da hanbao*, 19 Nov. 1920. *Hankou zhongxi bao*, 22 Dec. 1920.
[26] *Guomin xinbao*, 2 Oct. 1920. *Da hanbao*, 15 Dec. 1920.
[27] *Zhengfu gongbao*, 13 June 1921.

Zhangjiakou (Kalgan)

Another rail route out of the famine zone ran along the same axis due north of Beijing up the Beijing-Suiyuan rail line to the fertile areas beyond the Great Wall. Before the formal onset of famine in late summer 1920, groups of families referred to in the press as coming from the ranks of the poor (*pinmin*) were already arriving in the capital – in one case from as far away as Caozhou Prefecture in the extreme southwest of Shandong – with the intent of settling in Zhangjiakou (otherwise known as Kalgan), a city of 63,000 by the Great Wall on the edge of today's Inner Mongolia and soon a major source of relief grain. With the arrival of full-fledged famine conditions in Zhili and elsewhere in late summer, migrants – now dubbed refugees (*zaimin*) in the press – joined this well-trod path northward to Zhangjiakou, which in 1920 lay within the metropolitan administrative zone of Wang Hu, whom we had seen helping to orchestrate relief operations in the capital area in chapter three. Gendarmes in the area of Zhangjiakou were reportedly "dispensing relief monies (*fang zhenkuan*)" to incoming refugees as early as mid-September, and were ordered by Beijing gendarmerie commander Wang Huaiqing to "find a way to accommodate (*shefa anshu*)" them so that they did not "roam about homeless (*liuli shisuo*)."[28] Military and police officials often acted as facilitators in this movement, arranging for their setting off from the capital by train for Zhangjiakou, Suiyuan, or beyond.[29]

Soup kitchens set up by Zhang Guojun, the magistrate of Wanquan County, which included Zhangjiakou, were up and running in the city on the first of November, after which Zhang petitioned authorities for provincial tax-free passports (*huzhao*) for soup kitchen grain

[28] *Shihua*, 13 Aug. 1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 20 Sept. 1920.
[29] *Zhongguo minbao*, 30 Sept. 1920. *Minyi ribao*, 31 Oct. 1920.

supplies. Within the week, Zhang had gathered members of gentry, merchant, government, police and education (*shen shang zheng jing xue*) circles to create the Zhangjiakou Disaster Relief Society (*jiuzai hui*) on November 6 "especially for the relief of incoming refugees," who had by then numbered 10,000 in the vicinity of the city. By the middle of the month, with refugees arriving "still in an endless stream," lodging had been set up by the relief group, winter clothes were distributed to over 2,000 people, and the city soup kitchen was serving porridge twice daily, an operation for which county authorities would bring in at least 255,898 *jin* of grain in December and summon provincial agents to inspect the operation.[30]

Newspaper readers in Beijing were kept fairly well informed of the conditions on this northbound route, which the capital gendarmerie patrolled, learning in early November that 3 chi, or feet, of snowfall and "unusually cold" weather had led to many deaths there beyond the Great Wall. Seven hundred refugees lay dead on the roads leading to Zhangjiakou, and two hundred had died elsewhere in the region along with an unknown number of livestock and trees, while a second snowfall of 2 chi and gusty winds later in the month there led to "not a few" more deaths.[31] The bodycount prompted authorities in Zhangjiakou to add a mass grave for refugees, and Wanquan County officials transported the thousand-odd bodies through the snow to the site. The northward migration, facilitated by authorities, continued nonetheless into the New Year, a movement that included two hundred people from Zhili's Qingyun County who, after spending five days in January lodged in the western suburbs of Beijing, were sent by gendarmes onward to Zhangjiakou.[32]

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[30] *Da gongbao*, 16 Nov. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 30 Nov. 1920. *Zhengfu gongbao*, 13 June 1921.
[31] *Zhongguo minbao*, 6 Nov. 1920. *Shihua*, 6 Nov. 1920. *Chenbao*, 6 Nov. 1920. *Baihua guoqiang bao*, 6 Nov. 1920. *Shihua*, 28 Dec. 1920.
[32] *Chenbao*, 11 Dec. 1920. *Xiao minbao*, 7 Jan. 1921.

To the Northeast

By far the most popular route out of the famine zone passed through the environs of north China's main treaty port Tianjin, which became a major entrepôt for refugee movement over the crisis year, mostly onto the three provinces to the Northeast. Those who travelled by sea mostly arrived in Dalian or Yingkou across the Bo Hai sea, and continued north by rail where they would converge at Mukden (Shenyang) with those who had headed directly by train from Tianjin. Mukden, the capital of Fengtian (Liaoning), was also the seat of government of the three northeastern provinces, over which Zhang Zuolin ruled practically as sovereign, albeit with an enormously influential Japanese presence. In 1920, beyond ruling neighboring Korea as a colonial power, the Japanese held investments totaling 440 million yen in the South Manchurian Railway Company based in Dalian and running north to Changchun, "a quasi-governmental corporation with many subsidiary enterprises beyond railroads and one of the largest research organizations in the world until 1945," in the words of Prasenjit Duara.[33]

While we trace the flow of refugees into the Northeast expanse of China in 1920-21, this should offer a window into tis precise moment in regional and national politics. First, the reception of refugees by local officials over the year in Fengtian, Jilin, and Heilongjiang suggests a surprising amount of coordination in the administrative command structure from Zhang's seat of power in Mukden down to the *dao*, counties, and even villages across the three provinces. This is consistent with the findings of Yasutomi Ayumu, who, cited by Duara, showed that, unlike the rest of China where G. William Skinner's market communities did not match the administrative units of the state, in the Northeast economic and political fields were largely the same, creating a deeper penetration of state power down to the village level. "The coextensiveness of the economic and political realms," in other words, "enabled the county

[33] Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity*, 48.

administrative power to exercise much greater control over the villages than elsewhere in China."[34] Second, the flow of refugees into Zhang's northeastern domain from Zhili, Shandong and elsewhere in 1920-21 suggests that warlord rivalries had not yet reached the mid-1920s levels that starved state expenditure on public welfare and precluded private humanitarian measures such as the mobilization of Manchuria's bounty as relief for stricken regions of the country.

Unfortunately, there are limits to what can be ascertained from the sources used below. For one, from a limited use of news sources we cannot get into the minds of relief administrators at the highest level, such as Zhang himself, in 1920, to see to what degree national security (i.e. the threat of, say, a Japanese land-grab on the pretext of preventing a refugee plague epidemic or humanitarian catastrophe) may have played a role in his relief calculations. What is significant enough for our purposes here of explaining the low death toll in 1920-21 is that refugee relief for more than a million people evidently got done in communities across the Northeast. In the fall of 1920, Fengtian authorities faced crises much closer to home just as refugees were pouring in from the south: a hailstorm that ravaged the farming communities to the east of Mukden in October just as hundreds of Korean guerilla fighters – mostly "Korean farmers and students," according to the *North China Herald* – were launching devastating raids from their base areas in Jilin on Japanese consulates and other interests that same month (precipitating a punitive incursion, with nods from Beijing and Mudken, by 3,000 Japanese troops and air power against guerilla positions that lasted until early 1921).[35] It was in this context that official nods were

[34] "Yasutomi also attributes the rapidity with which the Guandong Army (*Kantōgun*) acquired control of the entire region after the Manchurian Incident [later in 1931] – in contrast to the rural quagmire that sank this very army in north China – to the unprecedented concentration of state power at the local level" in the Northeast. *Ibid.*, 44-46.
[35] "Guerilla Warfare in Manchuria – Korean Successes – Japanese Regiment Annihilated" ran a *North China Herald* headline several weeks later in the fall; Japanese authorities had reportedly suppressed news of the events. *Shengjing shibao*, 3 Oct. 1920. McCormack, *Chang Tso-lin*, 41-42. *North China Herald*, 18 Dec. 1920.

given to the movement of a million bodies into China's Northeast.

Leaving Tianjin

In the first few days of September, a week after the Tianjin Chamber of Commerce had brought in a reported 30,000 *shi*, or 3.6 million *jin* of grain from Anhui, for *pingtiao* sale to the public amid rising food prices, two thousand men and women, old and young, arrived from the hard-hit Zhili counties of Jiaohe and Xian, making their way to the provincial government offices where they pled for help, after which they were handed over to the care of the police.[36] Toward the middle of the month, Tianjin police official Yang Yide held a relief fundraising meeting with the city's merchant-gentry (*shenshang*) in light of the refugees streaming into the port city, raising $18,500 for initial relief services to arriving refugees.[37] Within three days, what became to be known as the Police Charity Relief Society (*jingchating yizhen hui*) was reportedly distributing cash and grain to arriving refugees, including a batch from seven nearby Zhili counties – 40 coppers and 5 *jin* of grain to each of its 538 adults, and 20 coppers and 3 *jin* of grain to each of its 434 children – after which the society met a group of 295 refugees arriving from another seven counties on the Zhili/Shandong border, handing out similar rations. The police then spent $400 to hire 24 boats to convey the refugees back to their home districts in hopes of a fall rain, a process that would be repeated over the course of the first half of autumn.[38] As we saw in chapter one, native charities launched seed distributions that reached at least fifty Zhili counties in October in case rain would at last materialize in sufficient measure for sowing crops for the spring. But, this of course would not solve the immediate food problem, and more

[36] *Da gongbao*, 24 Aug. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 2 Sept. 1920.
[37] This included $5,000 from Yang's office; $1,000 each from city police precincts; $2,000 from the police investigative bureau; $2,000 from the Bank of Communications and Zhili Bank; $500 from a Mr. Hu. *Tianjin zhongmei ribao*, 14 Sept. 1920.
[38] *Da gongbao*, 17 Sept. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 30 Sept. 1920. *Da gongbao,* 17 Oct. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 1 Nov. 1920.

and more opted for permanent settlement in the Northeast as the threatened failure of the fall harvest across much of south Zhili became a reality.

In what amounted then to a cat and mouse game with Tianjin police receiving and dispatching arriving refugees, families that had been returned to their homes earlier in the Fall by authorities came back in the thousands by November, some perishing on the roads, having found relief insufficient in their home districts. Already in early October "several ten thousand" refugees had begun camping in districts around Tianjin, most notably on an open space in Nankai (a major refugee camp that will be returned to in chapter five).[39] But, starting in September, police offered refugees the option of going on to the Northeast, and those deciding to do so were each given several *jiao* before they departed for Fengtian – mainly either by ship to Yingkou or by rail to Shenyang (then known internationally as Mukden), two routes to which we turn now.

Northeast by sea (Yingkou)

Over three days in early September, nine ships from Tianjin, and one from Longkou on the Shandong peninsula, conveyed 6,400 refugees to Yingkou (Newchwang), a treaty port lying a dozen miles up from the mouth of the Liao river in the northeast corner of the Liaodong Sea. From there, halfway up the rail line from Dalian to Mukden, they could continue by train up into the Northeastern provinces. Within days, on the 11th, a steamship carrying another 2,000 refugees approached the city, and members of the city's chamber of commerce (*zongshanghui*) and a bureau called the Sanjiang gongsuo convened with police with the aim of meeting the arrivals with modest amounts of relief monies. Men dispatched to the dock on the 11th handed out $1,094 total to the 2,000 alighting passengers; the following day $287 was distributed to

[39] *Chenbao*, 2 Nov. 1920. *Shihua*, 8 Oct. 1920.

another batch of arriving refugees and $150 was given out again the following morning of the 13th.[40] By the end of the month, with some 25,000 refugees already arrived on 16 vessels, $6,000 had been distributed in relief, an amount largely generated by a fundraising meeting of the above agencies, which formed a refugee relief society (*zaimin jiuji hui*) with money sourced, in part, from managers of the local branches of the Bank of China and Bank of Communications, a Nanyang Brothers Tobacco Company executive, men from a Fujian firm, and $600 personally from the head of the chamber of commerce, surnamed Pan.[41]

"No arrival of refugee boats is going unmet at the dock by representatives of the society," read an October report in a Jilin newspaper, whose readers were by then aware that a third of the stricken were, by government mandate (more on this below), heading for their province. It is unclear whether all arrivals received aid, or if only "women and the aged" did, which was the case with one dockside distribution by the society on the 20th of September when members of this more vulnerable group each received 10 *jiao*.[42] The daily procession of steamships to the treaty port would convey at least 100,000 Zhili, Henan and Shandong refugees in 64 vessels by early December.[43] These ships – each had its own name and was presumably operated by a shipping line – were apparently loaded to the brim, with anywhere from 1,000 to 2,000 on each and reports of deaths to illness onboard, prompting the Yingkou chamber of commerce to send a public appeal to its counterpart in Tianjin, from where most of the boats set off, insisting that refugees be conveyed by the steamship companies in a "humanitarian fashion (*rendao zhuji*);" follow-up reports on arriving vessels suggest that passenger numbers went unchanged (it is also

[40] *Jichang ribao*, 23 Sept. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 16 Sept. 1920.
[41] *Zhongguo minbao*, 29 Sept. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 26 Sept. 1920.
[42] *Jichang ribao*, 3 Oct. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 21 Sept. 1920.
[43] *Jichang ribao*, 7 Dec. 1920.

unclear what passage fees were incurred by refugees).[44] It is also noteworthy that this ready acceptance of such a number of bodies through this same port followed a cholera epidemic the year before in 1919 that claimed 10,000 lives in the Northeast, almost half in Harbin, an outbreak that was believed to have entered the region through the port of Yingkou. The completion of a quarantine hospital of the Chinese Plague Prevention Service at Yingkou in 1920 may explain the port's willingness to accept the year's influx of refugees, allowing doctors to examine arrivals.[45] The reported totals for the group's three-month effort by December are ambiguous, and apparently lay in the range of $20,000 to $40,000.[46]

Overland to the Northeast

Many made the trek from Tianjin to the northeast overland on foot or cart and were soon taken in by communities beyond the port city in northeastern Zhili. In the town of Shenwang in early November some 300 refugee households were lodged in 500 sheds procured by the railway police and supported by donations raised by town official Wang Yunxing at each of the area's warehouses and $250 donated by the local charitable (*shanshi*).[47] Others making it further east to Tangshan County were housed in a refugee shelter (zaimin liuyangsuo) set up by police beside the county's poor shelter (*pinmin jiujisuo*), and by December the facility had thirty rooms, jointly managed and funded with $4,000 from unnamed Europeans. Tangshan's contribution to the 1920 humanitarian effort was double-faceted, both providing room and board for arriving refugees and, according to railway records for the month of December, dispatching councilman (*xianshu*

[44] *Da gongbao*, 2 Oct. 1920.
[45] Carl Nathan, *Plague Prevention and Politics in Manchuria, 1910-1931* (Cambridge: East Asian Research Center, Harvard University, 1967), 64.
[46] *Shengjing shibao*, 8 Oct. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 27 Oct. 1920.
[47] The report adds that on December 3rd Wang Chunpu, Zhang Hongchi, and Tu Hanchen dispensed relief to other refugees in the area at the Cheng Family hospital (Chengshi yiyu) in nearby Guojia village. *Da gongbao*, 7 Nov 1920. *Da gongbao*, 7 Dec. 1920.

weiyuan) Wang Zuolin to the opposite end of Zhili province to deliver a 22 ton, or 36,960 *jin*, donation of relief grain from the county to its stricken counterpart on the Shanxi border, Neiqiu.[48] It should also be mentioned that, meanwhile, in some places, communities along routes tread by migrants out of the 1920 famine field were struck by simultaneous humanitarian crises of their own, straining their capacity to receive stricken strangers or to dispatch relief. One such case was Luan County (which spanned present-day Tangshan Prefecture) further east on the busy refugee route to The Northeast. With the county struck by a disastrous coal mine collapse in 1920, native Deng Yongfeng raised $10,000 gold to buy over 100 *mu* of land for distribution to stricken households for them to "settle down in peace," having previously set aside two mu of his own land for communal use by poor farmers, later giving "several hundred dollars" for the digging of a well for the water-deprived residents of nearby village named Guojie, this as famine refugees streamed through his community.[49]

Many migrant-refugees to the Northeast, however, bypassed greater Tianjin altogether, thus limiting the visibility of much of the refugee movement. What missionary Robert Tharp calls the "Henan famine" of 1920-21 in his memoirs "brought countless thousands of refugees through Lingyuan," a city just over the border from today's Hebei in Liaoning, where he resided as a child. "Christians and other volunteers cooked [grain] into a semi-liquid gruel and doled it out to those starving families as they went by," Tharp recounts. "Two doors away from us up the street, Mr. He also set up some cookstoves in the street and fed hundreds more…. Hurriedly, other feeding places were set up throughout the city, and for weeks thereafter the thousands were fed, then encouraged to move on to make way for still more." There is no reason to imagine that Lingyuan's reception of these desperate families – marching in "total silence," gleaning as they

[48] *Da gongbao*, 7 Dec. 1920. *Zhengfu gongbao*, 13 June 1921.
[49] *Luanxian XZ* 1938 12:40b-41a.

went, an occasional emaciated donkey or wheelbarrow with children – was atypical for communities along the refugee trail.[50]

In the end, how many made this journey into the three northeastern provinces of Fengtian (today's Liaoning), Jilin and Heilongjiang is likely impossible to compute. Compared to the numbers of migrants moving along the network of paths through the agricultural districts of Fengtian and beyond, though, authorities had a far better handle on the numbers moving into the Northeast on trains, a movement the state itself sponsored. In the last few days of August, railroad authorities were already adding extra trains to the Beijing-Fengtian line to convey refugees bound northeastward out of Tianjin. By the tens of thousands, residents of several dozen counties in western and southern Zhili, as well as from Cang, Qing, Hejian and other nearby counties, were reportedly arriving in Tianjin with the stated aim of settling in regions north of the Great Wall (*guan wai*) where they planned to open wasteland (*huangdi*) for cultivation (*kaiken*). Many arriving families were unable to pay for passage, and the railway assigned ten empty train cars to move them onto Fengtian free of charge at a rate of one train a day, a policy reportedly ordered by Zhili Governor Cao Rui a few days before on the 27th of August. In the meantime, railway officer Tang Zihua reportedly donated $4,000 to purchase several thousand *jin* of steamed bread (*mantou*) to feed the fleeing families as they awaited transport in the railway depot at Tianjin.[51]

In mid-September, a news report revealed that refugees were being conveyed in freight cars – twenty cars carrying sixty people each for a total of 1,200 refugees a day –from Tianjin into Fengtian, while readers of Yuandong bao, or "Far East Journal," in distant Harbin saw headlines on the "life-and-death struggle (*jue si*)" of Zhili refugees heading, ultimately, to their

[50] Tharp, *White Chinese,* 108-9.
[51] *Tianjin zhongmei ribao*, 31 Aug. 1920. *Shihua*, 30 Aug. 1920. *Chenbao*, 30 Aug. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 30 Aug 1920.

city and beyond in the great expanse of forested land in Heilongjiang Province, what was then known to the world as north Manchuria bordering Siberia.[52] It is unclear for how long refugees were moved in apparently uncovered freight trains; a report appearing in the Beijing press as late as February 1921 related that, for "humanitarian (*yi zhong rendao*)" reasons, open train cars were "without exception" changed for covered ones on lines controlled by the Minister of Communications by order of its top leadership.[53]

In early September, Zhili military governor Cao Kun and his counterpart in the Northeast, Zhang Zuolin, governor general of the three provinces of Fengtian, Jilin and Heilongjiang, were reportedly in negotiations on how to coordinate and cover the expenses of the transportation and resettlement of refugees in the Northeast.[54] Governing a total of eight Chinese provinces between them, Cao and Zhang had been victorious in the July 1920 war over the Anhui military bloc, which had presided over five provinces. Apparently having little in common aside from poverty-stricken childhoods – being the son of a Tianjin cloth peddler, in Cao's case, and a "sometime gambler, bandit, and vagabond" in Zhang's – the two men nevertheless struck a power balance over the course of the 1920-21 crisis year, muscling an "advisory" role for themselves onto the administrations of President Xu Shichang and the newly-restored Chinese Premier Jin Yunpeng in which the military men had a say on major appointments and national policy both in and beyond their respective domains. Politics throughout the Northeastern provinces (and increasingly throughout the rest of north China until his 1928 assassination) was very much dominated by the person of Zhang. In the space of a dozen years, the "tiny, frail-looking, mustachioed illiterate" man had gone from frontier bandit leader tapped to head a local garrison by a local prefect, in 1903, to governor of one of the country's most industrialized provinces, in

[52] *Yishi bao*, 17 Sept. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 24 Sept. 1920.
[53] *Qunbao*, 4 Feb. 1920.
[54] *Yuandong bao*, 4 Sept. 1920.

1915. In the meantime, Zhang "first came to prominence," Gavan McCormack explains, "because of his role in crushing the Republican revolutionaries in 1911-12," later giving "serious consideration" to the idea of setting up an "independent loyalist stronghold based in the old Manchu capital of Mudken," a "staunchly monarchist position" Zhang held on to even after Yuan Shikai had "come to terms with the revolutionaries." These politics, along with pro-Japanese sympathies, were not inconsistent with what appeared to be a traditional paternalistic policy Zhang followed over the course of the crisis toward the famine-ridden south and refugees flooding into his Northeastern domains. It should be mentioned that Zhang's own grandfather had fled his village during famine in Zhili for Fengtian exactly a century before in 1821, and his so-called Fengtian clique of political allies was mostly composed of first or second generation settlers from Zhili and Shandong.[55]

Later in September 1920, after having given a nod to Cao Kun for a mass movement of Zhili refugees into his jurisdiction, Zhang held a planning and fundraising meeting at his Fengtian provincial offices in Shenyang with the military governors of Heilongjiang and Jilin, along with the heads of various civic and business organizations in the province.[56] Within two weeks, Zhang had drawn up a public plan to keep a fifth of incoming refugees in Fengtian, the first and most populous of the provinces to the northeast of Zhili; thirty percent would continue on to settle in Jilin, which was under the administration of Bao Guiqing (a man from the very same village as Zhang in southern Fengtian); and half would go further along to Heilongjiang, where Sun Liechen, another ally and recent appointment of Zhang's, presided over the province.[57]

The northeastward flow of people on the rails via Tianjin continued through to the spring of 1921, halted on occasion out of fear of disease or other concerns. Sixty thousand people had

[55] McCormack, *Chang Tso-lin*, 9-10, 15, 17, 26.
[56] *Jingbao*, 25 Sept. 1920.
[57] *Jingbao*, 6 Oct. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 6 Oct. 1920. McCormack, *Chang Tso-lin*, 34.

died in north China from an outbreak of pneumonic plague that swept down along the rail line from the northern fringes of Heilongjiang in 1910, a fact doubtless on the minds of Fengtian officials who, citing outbreaks of an unspecified disease, cabled Zhili authorities to cut off the flow of bodies on the rail line in early September 1920. In the month of October 1920 an outbreak of pneumonic plague indeed erupted in the Northeast, but among migrant fur-trapping communities on the Mongolian border in the extreme west of Heilongjiang, an epidemic that then spread as far south as Shandong, claiming a total of 9,000 lives and using up $1.1 million in resources to handle the medical crisis.[58] Refugees heading northeast in 1920 were then more likely to be heading into the danger zone of pneumonic plague, a disease endemic in particular to Heilongjiang's marmot populations (whose coats could pass for marten or sable fur, a fact exploited by migrant trappers seeking to meet high fur demand in London, Leipzig, and elsewhere).[59] But, in the end, intermittent stoppages to refugee movement over the rails in 1920-21 were short-lived. In one November case, Zhang Zuolin's administration reportedly denied entry to 2,600 refugees arriving in Fengtian without travel passports. Trains were also halted that month due, reportedly, to six passenger deaths from the cold. An unspecified number of deaths were reported on the roads during these temporary stoppages.[60]

The Japanese-owned South Manchurian Railway, based in the port city of Dalian, announced in early October that it would begin transporting refugees for free along its rail network and would transport relief supplies for half price – having donated $60,000 already to an unspecified relief fund (possibly at the fundraising meeting Zhang Zuolin held with business leaders the week before in Shenyang).[61] Later, in December, the company reportedly added rail

[58] Nathan, *Plague Prevention*, 10, 65-66.
[59] *Da gongbao*, 9 Sept. 1920.
[60] *Da gongbao*, 10 Nov. 1920. *Shibao*, 13 Nov. 1920.
[61] *Shengjing shibao*, 2 Oct. 1920. *Chenbao*, 3 Oct. 1920.

cars for the transport of refugees northward to Harbin; reports at the end of the December related that trains were arriving in Tianjin on a daily basis from places like Cang County in Zhili and De County in Shandong "each with several cars designated for refugees headed beyond the Great Wall."[62]

Mukden (Shenyang)

The rail station of Mukden, capital of Fengtian Province, faced the western side of a 10-mile long mud rampart encircling the city. There, at the junction of the North China railway from Beijing and the Japanese South Manchurian Railroad running north from Dalian and Yingkou, refugees converged on the city from two directions. Some of the 2,000-3,000 refugees arriving per a day in early September, male and female, old and young, left immediately for points beyond the city. But many others stayed put, at least for a while, and they were instructed to camp only in the suburbs beyond the city's mud ramparts.[63] By the middle of the month, with several thousand refugees already camped out in mat-huts (*xipeng*), many of them built at official expense, at Huanggutun and Tawan villages outside the city's Small West Gate, officials were at one point handing out emergency relief (*jizhen*) of either one jin of fried dough or 1 *jiao* (*xiaoyang*) cash to each refugee there, expressly to prevent disorder and mass begging in the city.[64]

Within the mud ramparts was a relatively new brick wall, built in 1860, which formed an 11-meter-high circle around the inner city. Refugees were encouraged to seek out friends or family in the vicinity of the city but were otherwise barred from entering the city's downtown. Their encampments were limited to spaces beyond the city's earthen walls in the suburbs, where

[62] *Yuandong bao*, 5 Dec. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 27 Dec. 1920.
[63] *Yuandong bao*, 4 Sept. 1920.
[64] *Jichang ribao*, 15 Sept. 1920.

they were not allowed to beg (*qitao*) in large groups (da bang, literally "caravan"). Instead, begging for food (*qi shi*) in the countryside (*si xiang*) was not only permitted but encouraged with offers of $2 (*chuanzi*) to anyone willing to eke out a living (*mousheng*) elsewhere beyond the city. After the coming fall harvest of cereals, however, refugees would be prohibited from scattering in all the growing regions and all had to stay put in their lodgings. Lastly, refugees with intentions of going elsewhere in the region were to declare their intentions so that the affected authorities could be notified of their arrival and raise money for their emergency relief (*jizhen*).[65]

More than 100,000 refugees had arrived in the area of Mukden by the end of September, an estimated 70,000 of them from Zhili, and with the weather turning cold police had selected two sites – the Baoling Temple outside the city's Small West Gate and old soldier barracks outside the East Gate – as refugee lodgings (*zhu suo*).[66] Starting on the 20th of September, with $10,000 freshly issued by Zhang Zuolin for refugee relief efforts, the police had set up cooking facilities for dispensing congee twice a day at the main refugee encampment at Huanggutun; an initial four cauldrons were increased to nine later in October consuming 20 shi of grain a day. The establishment of Huanggutun camp was followed by another officially-sponsored cluster of huts and a cooking facility (*zhouguo*) at the nearby village of Hunhebao. By the end of October, 500 shi of sorghum had been consumed by the refugee soup kitchens at Huanggutun and Liushutun, another village, and the provincial finance bureau had released funds to acquire another 300 shi for the feeding of refugees.[67]

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[65] *Jichang ribao*, 9 Sept. 1920.
[66] *Yuandong bao*, 19 Sept. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 30 Sept. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 29 Sept. 1920.
[67] *Jichang ribao*, 22 Sept. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 30 Sept. 1920. *Yuandongbao*, 1 Oct. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 6 Oct. 1920. *Shengjing shibao*, 20 Oct. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 20 Oct. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 27 Oct. 1920.

It might be mentioned that in the course of the same week a hailstorm obliterated the fall crops of 15 villages in the eastern outskirts of Shenyang, reportedly destroying the stocks of even the district's wealthy families. Devising a relief scheme within days of the storm, one that involved a gentry-run operation levying surplus grain from unaffected neighboring districts, competed for the attention of local authorities dealing with the inundation of refugees from the south.[68] (Toward the end of October, the Fengtian provincial assembly reportedly legislated the establishment of four charity granaries (*yicang*) as "preparation for drought disaster," one in each of the rural districts surrounding the provincial capital, stocked through a levy of half a sheng of grain applied to each mu of arable land in each district.)[69] In the middle of October, a report critical of official relief for refugees at Huanggutun appeared in a major Japanese-owned city paper, *Shengjing shibao*, pointing out that mat sheds would do little to shelter the poor there from the looming winter, especially as they moved about in the cold for much of the day in search of supplementary food.[70] Coincidental with this negative press or not, within ten days Zhang Zuolin had instructed the municipal police and civil administration (*zhengwu ting*) to purchase 20,000 sets of old army clothes for distribution to refugees at Huanggutun and elsewhere, and erect several more soup kitchen facilities inside and outside of the city. His reported plan also included the conversion of temples and vacant official facilities into shelters (*qiliusuo*) to operate until spring, when money would be raised to send refugees north to open lands for agriculture (*kaiken*).[71] In a related effort that same week, municipal police chief Wang Lianpo decided on using seized gambling money to finance the annual winter opening of poor shelters (*shourongsuo*) in the city, while his office was assisting a local benevolence hall, the Hall of

[68] *Shengjing shibao*, 3 Oct. 1920.
[69] *Shengjing shibao*, 24 Oct. 1920.
[70] *Shengjing shi bao*, 12 Oct. 1920.
[71] *Jichang ribao*, 22 Oct. 1920.

Common Goodness, or Tongshantang, with its annual launch of winter housing and grain distribution for the city's population of beggars (*qigai*).[72]

Mukden and the zone

One of the earlier Mukden city fundraising efforts to appear in the press was a mid-September meeting of Zhili and Shandong natives at a temple outside the city's main western gate for relief of their respective native-place districts (*sangzi*) with a plan to target industrial and business concerns in the city for donations, but the results are unclear.[73] A group about which more is evident built itself on the framework of a previously-existing Society for the Relief of Refugees from the Zhili War Zone, or Zhili zhandi zaimin zhenji hui; out of it, members of the Fengtian Provincial Assembly (*shengyi hui*) formed the Fengtian Province Disaster Relief Society, or Fengsheng jiuji hanzai xiehui, on the 29th of October for the relief of Zhili, Shandong and Henan as well as local communities affected by harvest failure in Fengtian itself.[74] One of the first fundraising moves by the group was to announce a policy of docking five percent of the monthly salary of all on the provincial payroll, which included military, government and education employees (although a report from November put the deduction from the monthly pay of state office workers [*zhirenyuan*] at ten percent).[75] Fundraising also included five consecutive days of benefit performances at a city theater starting on November 22, earning over $2,000 on the first night's performance (but only $1,100 the following night due to heavy snowfall) plus several hundred dollars generated by tea and cigarettes served, apparently, by prostitutes (*jinü*)

[72] When official shelters closed in late March of the following year, many residents were sent to this benevolence hall's shelters, which doubled as workhouses and trade schools for the poor. *Shengjing shibao*, 5 Oct. 1920. *Shengjing shibao*, 20 Oct. 1920. *Shengjing shibao*, 30 Oct. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 5 Dec. 1920. *Shengjing shibao*, 24 March 1921. *Shengjing shibao*, 26 March 1921.
[73] *Jichang ribao*, 16 Sept. 1920.
[74] *Shengjing shibao*, 30 Oct. 1920.
[75] *Yuandongbao*, 30 Oct. 1920. *Zhenzai ribao*, 22 Nov. 1920.

during the performances.[76] By mid-December, the group had amassed $100,000 in relief funds and handed over the details of its accounts to the provincial government. It is unclear exactly how this money was spent or remitted to the famine field, but one report detailed how the society sent ten men on the 29th of December to accompany 3,000 *shi*, or possibly 480,000 *jin*, of relief grain by train to Quyang County in western Zhili near the city of Baoding.[77]

For their part, members of the gentry, merchants, farmers, workers and others not on the state payroll were publicly urged by the society to "donate at will (*sui yi juanzhu*)." In the middle of November, chamber of commerce chief Lu Zongxi, unable to "sit and watch" as other groups in Fengtian raised money for refugees and the famine field to the south, gathered small and large business firms in the city to orchestrate their own fundraising, albeit with unknown results.[78] Over two days that same week, a fundraising effort run jointly by public high schools in the city grossed $10,000, which was reportedly remitted immediately to the famine zone through the provincial government.[79] The city's pharmacies (*yaohang*) followed suit, deciding at a December trade convention that each firm would contribute on a scale of $200 down to $20 according to its capital size, and within days $17,000 from the effort was reportedly remitted to the famine zone through the chamber of commerce.[80] A Beijing paper reported the same month of December that the head manager (*duban*) of the *dongqing* railroad in Fengtian, surnamed Song, was raising and sending (*te chou chu*) in 30 trains (*lieche*) of relief grain below the Great Wall (*neiguan*).[81] Mukden's Japanese community was reportedly raising relief monies among themselves, which

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[76] *Yuandong bao*, 28 Nov. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 30 Nov. 1920.
[77] The choice to relieve Quyang is curious, since apparently only 0-20% of its fall 1920 harvest had failed; it is likely, though, that Quyang's lower level of distress may have led provincial relief organs to largely pass it over, which had been the case in Cang County, which we examined in chapter two. *Yuandong bao*, 19 Dec. 1920. *Shengjing shibao*, 1 Jan. 1921.
[78] *Yuandong bao*, 13 Nov. 1920.
[79] *Yuandong bao*, 13 Nov. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 30 Nov. 1920.
[80] *Yuandong bao*, 21 Dec. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 22 Dec. 1920.
[81] *Zhongguo minbao*, 17 Dec. 1920.

included $1,000 gold from the Japanese Red Cross (*chizi she*) of Manchuria remitted to the Interior Ministry through Zhang Zuolin's Fengtian administration in early November, and $4,000 later the same month from an effort by Japanese merchants in the city, again remitted through the provincial government.[82]

Elsewhere in Fengtian (Liaoning)

Over the course of the Fall, the Fengtian provincial capital experienced a high turnover of refugees camping for a period at one of several sites around the city with official lodging and feeding facilities, or fending for themselves, before moving elsewhere once healthy harvests materialized in the region, followed by new batches of more refugees. As refugees scattered around Fengtian, and to begin meeting his stated goal of absorbing twenty percent of refugees in the province, Zhang Zuolin ordered all counties to take in an initial 300-500 refugees each and raise sufficient funds for their accommodation (*anzhi*). County magistrates were also instructed to make head counts of refugees arriving in their districts, making sure to tally age and sex so to prepare relief measures.[83] Considering its sparser population, Fengtian's eastern edge was especially targeted for the dispatch of large groups of refugees with the aim of having them ultimately open land there for agriculture starting in the spring.[84]

Zhang had also instructed county magistrates to work with chambers of commerce, education bureaux and other local bodies to pool relief contributions from the public, which would then be remitted to the provincial government for the mass purchase of grain for the famine zone. With fundraising sprouting around the province, Zhang ordered county magistrates to be on their guard for malfeasance, sending state inspectors out to check up on the province-

[82] *Zhongguo minbao*, 10 Nov. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 28 Nov. 1920.
[83] *Shibao*, 7 Nov. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 5 Oct. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 7 Nov. 1920.
[84] *Yuandong bao*, 31 Oct. 1920. *Shengjing shibao*, 15 Jan. 1921.

wide campaign, with unknown effect.[85] While it is difficult to get figures on the success and size of the rural response to refugee needs and those of the famine zone among Fengtian counties, one report from as far as Andong on the Yalu River (today known as Dandong on the border with North Korea) detailed how one of its two police bureaux had reportedly answered Zhang's fundraising call with a collection of $1,120 by the end of October, after which the city police chief, himself a native of Tianjin, generated another few hundred dollars in donations and Chinese merchants pooled an additional $3,000, which they remitted to the famine zone in early December.[86] Fortunately, a little more detail can be gleaned from news reports on the county-level activities further north in Jilin and Heilongjiang, which we examine next.

Jilin City

"For splendour of buildings" Jilin – a walled city of about half a million people and the capital of the province by the same name – was "unrivaled throughout Manchuria," a 1913 Japanese government guidebook instructed tourists, who could reach the city on a newly-constructed rail extension from Changchun. The city's architecture and shipbuilding industry were products of the great timber reserves in nearby mountains, and main thoroughfares in the city were even paved with wooden blocks instead of the hardened earth that would quickly turn to mud.[87] Making their way north from Fengtian, many refugees from Zhili and Shandong arrived in Jilin Province in mid-September by foot and cart, making their way to friends or family, according to some reports, while others camped out temporarily in the vicinity of Jilin city before moving on elsewhere. At the end of September, Jilin municipal police made a

[85] *Shengjing shibao*, 8 Oct. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 20 Nov. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 2 Dec. 1920.
[86] *Shengjing shibao*, 23 Oct. 1920. *Shengjing shibao*, 30 Oct. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 7 Dec. 1920.
[87] Imperial Japanese Government Railways, *An Official Guide to Eastern Asia – Transcontinenal Connections between Europe and Asia, Vol. 1 Manchuria and Chosen* (Tokyo, 1913), 79.

headcount of 5,000 refugees from Henan, Shandong and Zhili; there some were accommodated (*anzhi*) by city authorities, the others divided among nearby counties.[88] Later in October, the magistrate of Jilin County announced to authorities that 800 refugees had just arrived in his jurisdiction and that he was dividing them between the county's ten main districts and towns (*xiangzhen*) at 80 refugees each; a circular distributed by the magistrate after the New Year, instructed district police offices to ensure that refugees passing through their districts did not perish from the cold, suggesting that refugees were still passing into the district in early 1921.[89]

During the Republic, Jilin, a rivertown, was being eclipsed by the railroad town of Changchun, some sixty miles to the west of Jilin city with a population of roughly half a million. The provincial capital later under the People's Republic, Changchun, a major soybean market, lay on the rail line running between Mukden and Harbin to the north, so the city lay in the main channel of refugee movement and would see refugees often in batches of close to 1,000 arriving by rail through the Fall, again some staying put, other moving north.[90] Changchun was also the northern extent of the zone leased by the Japanese South Manchurian Railway, which extended down to the port of Dalian at the southern end of Fengtian. The rail network of the Chinese Eastern Railway, a concern of Russian banks, started here northward to Harbin and into Heilongjiang.

Changchun

The twin cities of Changchun and Jilin shared a valuable news source, Jichang ribao, which offers glimpses into soup kitchen activity around Changchun starting in September, when Cai Pinsan, the Changchun-Jilin city district's intendant (*daoyin*), a military position above that

[88] *Jichang ribao*, 19 Sept. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 30 Sept. 1920.
[89] *Jichang ribao*, 31 Oct. 1920. *Shengjing shibao*, 1 Jan. 1921.
[90] *Jichang ribao*, 20 Oct. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 29 Oct. 1920.

of the magistrate, met with officials and gentry (*guanshen*) to raise money for the establishment of a soup kitchen at the Dafo (Big Buddha) Temple in the western part of Changchun expressly for arriving refugees; at the same time, Cai requested $5,000 from military governor Bao Guiqing for emergency relief measures.[91] A report later in October related that managers of businesses in the city, determining that the facility at the temple was insufficient to meet the needs of the growing numbers of refugees passing into the city, raised funds for the opening of a soup kitchen facility in the city's New Market (Xin shichang) district.[92] This operation was soon joined by two soup kitchens run annually each winter by gentry (*shengshen*) households in the city: the first had been operating from the start of each winter to the following spring for more than ten years by the household of Niu Zihou. By the last week in November 1920 the facility was serving at the Hall of Long Spring and Morality (Yongchunde yuan) at a city wharf. A second facility was sponsored by wealthy gentryman Han Jintang, founder of the Yitaichang grain firm, and ran every year over the winter season at the Guanyintang Temple, but in December 1920 was moving operations to the Temple of the City God (Chenghuang miao).[93] Similar to the activity we had seen in Beijing in chapter three, local merchant-gentry appeared at these facilities over the course of winter to distribute clothes to those fed there; a member of the gentry surnamed Wen reportedly took note in late November that refugees attending both the Han and Niu family facilities were in many cases threadbare and gave the police 54 sets of clothes for them to distribute at both; later in December the manager of a local business gave out several hundred items of clothes.[94]

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[91] *Jichang ribao*, 23 Sept. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 24 Sept. 1920.
[92] *Jichang ribao*, 20 Oct. 1920.
[93] *Jichang ribao*, 26 Nov. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 1 Dec. 1920.
[94] *Yuandong bao*, 28 Nov. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 19 Dec. 1920.

Changchun and the zone

Mobilization by Changchun society for the relief of the famine field itself involved a variety of groups, although figures for their efforts are difficult to find. Unfortunately, news briefs in the region's papers quoted rarely, if ever, from the speeches given at relief fundraisers, and it is difficult to say whether national shame, native-place kinship, fears of social disorder, compassion, or a combination of motivations were foremost in the minds of those appealing to local residents to open their purses for those suffering in the famine districts below the Great Wall. But, if the editorial columns appearing daily in both of these major newspapers are any indication, the logic and tenor of public appeals for relief mobilization in the Chinese communities of Changchun and Harbin were varied. The writer of a "current affairs (*shi pin er*)" column in *Jichang ribao* repeatedly chose to shame his Northeastern readership into donating to relief efforts for their "compatriots (*tongbao*)" by stressing the actions taken so far by members of the foreign community in China, particularly Europeans and Americans.[95] But then more prominently placed editorials in the same pages of the paper left out such comparisons to foreigners or southern Chinese, instead seeking to mobilize Jilin residents by pointing out the native-place (*sangzi*) roots that many Northeasterners had with afflicted Zhili and Shandong, or by making straight emotional appeals.[96] Up in Harbin, *Yuandong bao*, a paper partly under Russian management, offered a similar variety of printed appeals to the Chinese public there, with some pieces comparing relief initiatives by Harbin's Chinese unfavorably against the dozen-train cars of flour already dispatched to the famine zone by members of the large Russian community in the city, while others attempted simply to pull at the heart-strings of readers on

[95] *Jichang ribao*, 19 Sept. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 23 Sept. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 28 Oct. 1920.
[96] *Jichang ribao*, 22 Sept. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 23 Sept. 1920.

behalf of their stricken "compatriots (*tongbao*)."[97]

In the last chapter we explored the activities of one of the main syncretic religious groups there, the Society for Awakening Goodness, or *Wushanshe*; similarly, the Jilin branch of the *Tongshanshe*, a secretive "ethical philosophical" organization of mostly affluent businessmen and officials, founded in Beijing in 1914 with city chapters in nearly every province in the country, responded to an appeal from its Zhili branch in September 1920 with a campaign that remitted donations through the local branch of the Bank of China to its Zhili counterpart for relief of the famine zone.[98] Shanxi province natives living in the city announced plans in October to emulate the charity benefit theatrical performances and other fundraising operations that were reportedly underway by then in the city among their Zhili and Shandong counterparts. The Changchun YMCA teamed up with high school students for relief fundraising, artists donated their work to relief sales, and the provincial agricultural association formed its own relief subcommittee.[99] Provincial government organizers of the National Day celebration in October canceled theatrical performances and entertainment over the holiday and reportedly diverted the savings to a famine fund; the athletics association of Jilin Province donated $1,400 from tickets sold for a two-day sports event in October, around when the Shandong Native-Place Association of Jilin began pooling donations for relief from Shandong firms in the province.[100]

Possibly the largest single mobilizer of relief monies in the Fall however was a relief society, or yizhen hui, chaired by Bao Guiqing, the military governor, and led by both the head of the chamber of commerce and of the provincial assembly as vice chairs. At the effort's

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[97] *Yuandong bao*, 7 Oct 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 5 Nov. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 6 Nov. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 1 Oct. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 9 Dec. 1920.
[98] *Jichang ribao*, 26 Sept. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 16 Oct. 1920. Twinem, "Modern Syncretic Religious Societies. I," 464.
[99] *Jichang ribao*, 30 Sept. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 2 Oct. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 9 Oct. 1920. *Shengjing shibao*, 20 Oct. 1920.
[100] *Shengjing shibao*, 5 Oct. 1920.

inaugural meeting on the 2nd of October it was decided that all military officers and provincial state officials would contribute according to the following progressive scale: monthly salaries of over $30 would be docked 10 percent; salaries over $100 would be docked 20 percent; and salaries over $200 would be docked 30 percent, all for a maximum of three months.[101] By the middle of October, Bao had reportedly started collecting from those earning $200 and up, which alone was expected to net $10,000 each of the next three months.[102] At a November meeting of provincial school administrators and teachers it was decided that those receiving monthly salaries exceeding $30 would also contribute 10 percent of their pay, with a limit of a $1 contribution for anyone below that threshold.[103] Later in November, deeming fundraising insufficient for the growing crisis in north China, the society turned to the entertainment sector for contributions, arranging for theater complexes in Changchun to contribute one percent of monthly ticket sales during the three-month campaign, for restaurants in the city to contribute two percent of monthly income, and for second-rate (*erdeng*) and third-rate (*sandeng*) brothels (*jiguan*) to contribute $2.20 or $2.10 for every $100 of monthly income, respectively. The county government and police were tasked with ensuring compliance (*zunzhao*).[104] Then, in December, the society enlisted the police to classify households in the city according to a three-tiered scale of perceived ability to contribute to the city-wide relief fund: with the police list handed over to the relief society, household members were asked to go themselves (*zixing*) to the society's offices with 100 *diao*, 50 *diao*, or ten *diao*, determined to be their suggested contribution (*renjuan*), and they would receive a receipt in return.[105]

The dispatch of these monies to the famine zone apparently began in late October with a

[101] *Jichang ribao*, 3 Oct. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 5 Oct. 1920.
[102] *Shengjing shibao*, 14 Oct. 1920.
[103] *Yuandong bao*, 5 Nov. 1920.
[104] *Yuandong bao*, 24 Nov. 1920.
[105] *Jichang ribao*, 5 Dec. 1920.

remittance of $20,000 by the executive committee through the provincial finance bureau, which was split between four afflicted provinces ($8,000 to Zhili, $7,000 to Shandong, $3,000 to Henan, and $2,000 to Shanxi).[106] Later in November, the society again remitted $20,000 through the finance bureau, this time to the main international relief committee in Tianjin; the report detailed that the portion of the remittance allocated to Shanxi, $3,000, was relayed via a native bank (Jinsheng yinhang) to the Shanxi Provincial Government.[107] In early December, the international relief committee in Tianjin again received $20,000 from the Jilin finance bureau: $6,000 for Zhili and $2,000 for Shanxi, while $6,000 went each to Shandong and Henan via another native bank (Maijiali yinhang).[108] A fourth remittance of $20,000 went out later in the month through the finance bureau, this time to all five of the afflicted provinces "for authorities (*dangju*) there to distribute," and a cable expressing thanks was received in return from the Shandong military governor.[109]

Rural Jilin

In late October the Jilin Relief Society had asked the provincial government to issue instructions to district intendants (*daoyin*) and county magistrates to work with local gentry to create sub-branches for relief fundraising purposes and the reception of refugees.[110] At least a dozen counties reportedly followed the order over the fall and winter, according to press reports, with rural district chiefs and local defense squads (*baoweituan*) in places such as Jilin County tasked with looking out for incoming refugees, and magistrates and other local actors drumming

[106] *Shengjing shibao*, 20 Oct. 1920. *Shengjing shibao*, 31 Oct. 1920.
[107] *Da gongbao*, 23 Nov. 1920.
[108] *Da gongbao*, 2 Dec. 1920.
[109] *Yuandong bao*, 18 Dec. 1920.
[110] *Jichang ribao*, 31 Oct. 1920.

up donations in their respective districts in such as places as Sipingjie and Lishu.[111] Fortunately, articles appeared in the regional press that provide a good amount of detail on the fall activity in several more remote counties in Jilin Province.

Liaoyuan County, just across the provincial border from Fengtian, had no rail line in 1920, and the refugees streaming in from as far away as Zhili, Shandong and Henan appeared there by cart or on foot. Magistrate Zhao Shoushan and his police chief had reportedly failed to mobilize adequate relief monies by the middle of October, when a local army division commander, Wu Xingquan, teamed up with them and local merchants to hold five days of benefit performances (*yiwu xi*) at a large local theater and teahouse complex featuring, apparently, well-known actors and actresses. At first, magistrate Zhao and commander Wu were reportedly handing relief proceeds to arriving refugees simply for them to go on to elsewhere in the district (*dao*) to eke out a living (*mousheng*), but soon instructions arrived from Zhang Zuolin's Shenyang offices for all counties in the Northeast to share the responsibility of taking in a share of arriving refugees amassing in the Fengtian capital, and within days 2,000 additional refugees were on their way to Liaoyuan. Zhao and Wu then convened with the heads of the county merchant and agricultural associations, pooling money and grain for their arrival: Wu himself reportedly donated $5,000; the district intendant $1,000; magistrate Wu $200; the local bureau of schools $100; and the merchant association an unspecified amount of money, all managed by a relief bureau set up at the county offices.[112]

Due north of Liaoyuan lay the neighboring county of Yitong, where in mid-October magistrate Zhu Yuezhi received a cable from the Jilin governor informing him that 700 refugees from Zhili and Shandong were on their way to his jurisdiction, presumably by cart or foot, since

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[111] *Shengjing shibao*, 22 Oct. 1920. *Shengjing shibao*, 31 Oct. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 31 Oct. 1920. *Shengjing shibao*, 1 Jan. 1921. *Yuandong bao*, 29 Jan. 1921.
[112] *Shengjing shibao*, 22 Oct. 1920. *Shengjing shibao*, 24 Oct. 1920. *Shengjing shibao*, 1 Jan. 1921.

the county, some fifty miles due south of Changchun, had no railroad presence either. Zhu was instructed to solicit donations from the public (*quanjuan*) at once to relieve the approaching famished group (*xuji*), after which he reportedly assembled the area gentry (*tushen*) to discuss raising funds out of, in part, fear that the refugees would scatter all over his jurisdiction if nothing was prepared for their arrival. Zhu ordered his chief of police to secure a facility downtown with thirty empty rooms for refugee lodging, and secured a donation of 40 *shi*, or 4,800 *jin*, of grain from a man surnamed Du at what appears to have been a benevolence hall in town called the Hall of Devotion and Peace, or Zhonghetang, plus another 20 *shi*, or 2,400 *jin*, from a local official (*ying chengxiang*) named Cai and an unspecified amount of donated grain and rent revenue from local gentry, reportedly avoiding any disorder when the refugees arrived.[113]

Further to the northeast, right above Jilin City, lies the county of Shulan, also without a rail connection in 1920. There, in early November, county tax office chief Kui Douzhen convened with 100 area merchant-gentry and other members of the community at a local church, where he was elected relief fundraising chief and amassed 5,000 *diao* for remittance to the famine zone. Within days, 500 refugees appeared in the area, half of whom were assigned to work projects in the county (*congshi gongzuo*), the rest sent to reclaim arable land along the banks of a local river, according to a report submitted by the magistrate to the province and which found its way into a Harbin newspaper.[114]

Further north in Yushu County, some thirty miles east of the main rail line running up to Harbin, officials and merchants likewise convened in November in a local church building for a county fundraising meeting attended by 500 people; the county magistrate, surnamed Mo, and

[113] *Shengjing shibao*, 15 Oct. 1920.
[114] *Jichang ribao*, 11 Nov. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 14 Nov. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 18 Nov. 1920.

the parish minister each donated 2,000 *diao*, the tax office chief donated 1,600 *diao*, two local men each gave 1,000 *diao*, while others contributed smaller amounts for a combined total of 26,192 *diao*, reportedly for immediate remittance to unspecified sections of the famine zone – enough for recipients there to purchase over half a million *jin* of grain at *pingtiao* centers (or a day's rations for a million people). Later the same month, magistrate Mo's wife summoned the wives of police, merchants, and area gentry at the county's girls school for a fundraising meeting attended by 34 people, raising what appears to have been a disappointing 900 *diao*; afterwards, she was joined by the wife of a church minister to pay visits to gentry families that had neglected to send representatives and pressed them for contributions.[115]

Shuangcheng, a fortress town 32 miles south of Harbin on the rail line running up from Changchun, had a "most prosperous appearance" in the 1910s as the center of trade in its grain-producing section of northern Jilin. One of the oldest cities in the region, and with a sizeable Russian community amid a total district population of over 300,000, a large number of its distilleries, cotton-cloth merchants and oil factories were owned by Zhili, Shanxi and Shandong natives.[116] In October 1920, the county magistrate assembled merchant-gentry (*shenshang*) at the chamber of commerce to form a temporary relief committee (*linshi zhenji hui*) chaired by the magistrate. Twenty-four staffers were then sent around the county to both town and country (*ge xiangzhen*) to drum up relief monies from wealthy gentry in each district, according to a news report, which curiously added that the locals were notably "happy to give freely to good works (*leshan haoshi*)," using a stock phrase for public generosity often found in gazetteer biographies. While no figures were given for the county-wide effort, a later report from December recounted

[115] This above purchase estimate is based on the assumption that *diao* in this part of Jilin were indeed strings of 100 coppers each, the traditional Chinese standard; there were some exceptions to this, such as the Beijing *diao*, which was a tenth of the value at 10 coppers each. *Jichang ribao*, 3 Nov. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 21 Nov. 1920.
[116] Imperial Railways, *Guide to Eastern Asia*, 61.

that students at a public elementary school in Shuangcheng held a benefit performance that month at a teahouse facility for which they generated an "unusual (*yichang*)" amount of funds over three days of ticket sales: 50,000 *diao* sent to the famine field via the provincial capital – enough to buy one million *jin* of grain at pingtiao centers, equal to a day's relief ration for roughly two million people.[117]

Fujiadian (Harbin)

"Coolie (*kuli*) takes pity on refugee," ran a headline in Harbin's main Chinese-language news daily in mid-November 1920. The refugee was a woman roaming the city's Fujiadian district – the official destination for freshly-arrived refugees and thus teeming with desperate stories – as she carried an infant girl and towed along a young son, stretching her free hand out to passersby. A young laborer stopped to ask where in the country she had come from. Zhili, she replied, and the man, reportedly "spurred with thoughts of his own native-place (*sangzi*)," handed the woman $3 silver. With bystanders reportedly aghast at the exchange, the woman promptly kowtowed four times in thanks and was off, gripping enough cash to feed herself and her children for well over a month.[118] Aside from its poignancy, what should interest us here about this anecdote is the role native-place played in a moment's exchange between strangers hundreds of miles from the famine zone. Consumers of news in Harbin had learned only recently that Zhang Zuolin had mandated that half of all refugees destined for the Northeast would pass through Harbin and head to Heilongjiang Province, and that many would stay for good, opening up land in the forested frontiers in the spring.[119] What would amount to close to a million bodies arriving in Heilongjiang by the spring would put upward pressure on local food prices, at least in

[117] *Shengjing shibao*, 26 Oct. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 11 Nov. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 18 Nov. 1920.
[118] *Yuandong bao*, 12 Nov. 1920.
[119] *Yuandong bao*, 5 Oct. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 7 Oct. 1920.

the short-term. Yet the Harbin public, and especially its poor, to which this "coolie" belonged, was already experiencing price hikes – an increase of 25 percent in the case of sorghum, a major relief grain, since the start of the crisis – as agents from the south put in orders for hundreds of millions of *jin* of Manchurian grain to compensate for the failed harvests in Zhili, Shandong and elsewhere.[120] The fact, then, that as high as ninety percent of the inhabitants of China's vast Northeast could trace their origins to the two afflicted provinces of Zhili and Shandong should be borne in mind as we examine refugee reception and relief mobilization in the region in 1920-21. Zhang Zuolin's own grandfather, as we have heard, had left his village in Zhili amid famine a full century before, in 1821, and come to the Northeast,[121] a mass migration of able-bodied men in good years and of whole households in disastrous ones that accelerated with the intensified humanitarian crises of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries just as the ailing Qing dynasty abandoned its preferred policy of limited Han migration to the imperial family's ancestral homeland.

Under the Republic, Harbin was a subprovincial city at the very northern edge of Jilin Province; it was also a treaty port hosting the largest Western – mostly Russian – population in China and a community that had seen an explosion of growth after the Russo-Japanese war of 1905. The commercial hub of what was then called north Manchuria, the city lay at a fork in the railway coming north from Changchun. At Harbin, one branch ran eastward to the Russian border and the port of Vladivostok beyond; the other cut westward through the wheat and millet fields of the Northeast Plain and over the Khingan Range to the Mongolian steppe and onward to Lake Baikal and the city of Irkutsk (and, ultimately, to Western Europe). Since the city was, in 1920, the central distribution point for trade and production originating in the vast forests and

[120] *Yuandong bao*, 1 Dec. 1920.
[121] McCormack, *Chang Tso-lin*, 15.

fields over the provincial border in Heilongjiang, Harbin lay as much in the orbit of the neighboring military governor headquartered 170 miles to the northwest in the Heilongjiang capital of Qiqihar, or Tsitsihar. (Only later under the People's Republic did the provincial border shift south and was Harbin made the provincial seat of Heilongjiang.)

Adding another layer of complexity to sources of authority in the city, Harbin was also the seat of government for the leased railway zone of the Chinese Eastern Railway, a Russian state concern whose custodianship passed to the Chinese government in 1920 in light of disruptions wrought by the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. The concession zone of the railway in fact formally changed hands in September 1920, the moment refugees began arriving in force from the south. In early 1921, with the creation of the Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the Eastern Provinces (*dongsheng tebiequ*), Chinese officials fully assumed the powers previously held by Russian administrators, marking the "first time that a Chinese government had exercised political authority over all of Harbin."[122] Harbin's main Chinese-language news daily, Yuandong bao, or Far East Journal, and a major source for this chapter, was also a product of the Russian railroad presence, having been founded in 1907 by the Russian management of the Chinese Eastern Railway. (As James Carter explains, despite this foreign control, "many nationalist Chinese considered [Yuandong bao] worth reading, one of only five newspapers in China so designated in 1910 by the China International Student Federation.")[123] Testing the capacity of Harbin residents to deal with a mass arrival of refugees from the south in 1920 were the Russian refugees that would appear in the city regularly over the course of the summer and

[122] Chinese Eastern Railway, *North Manchuria*, vii-viii, 31. James H. Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin: Nationalism in an International City, 1916-1932* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 22.
[123] "The publisher, A. V. Spitsyn, advocated a progressive agenda that included mutual cooperation between Russian and Chinese societies," Carter explains. "The Yuandong bao was meant to foster such friendly ties, and to help accomplish this goal the paper included anti-Russian articles culled from the British and American press and also toned down Russian criticisms of Chinese officials. A supplement written in the Chinese vernacular attempted to reach the lower classes of Chinese society..." Carter, *Chinese Harbin*, 28, 32.

fall, 10,000 freshly-arrived in September alone, fleeing unrest and the Soviet regime at home; most arrived with no job and little capital, earning themselves a reputation, at least, for fueling crime and prostitution in the city.[124] More, the Chinese Red Cross in Harbin was active over the summer of 1920 rescuing Chinese expatriates in trouble spots over the border in Siberia.[125]

Into this context "not a few" refugees from Zhili and Shandong appeared as early as mid-September at the rail station in Harbin (on trains running free of charge by order of Zhang Zuolin) where they reportedly crowded the ticketing hall and begged in the area.[126] While handouts to arriving refugees are difficult to number, they could be substantial, such as when a man surnamed Xu handed out $50 to Zhili refugees stepping onto the platform at Harbin on a train from Changchun, enough to buy from the market a half-*jin* of sorghum – the daily ration given out by relief societies – for 1,540 people.[127] Publicly expressing concerns that there might be disorderly elements among the refugees piling into the city, police met arriving refugees at the station throughout the Fall and escorted them to lodging (*ge dian fang nei*) on Taigu Street in Fujiadian district, while others were escorted to points east of the city. (With a 1920 population of roughly 115,000, Fujiadian, more commonly referred to as Daowai by Chinese, was the Chinese section of Harbin and the seat of Chinese administration in the region, separated from the main Harbin business district by railroad tracks.) Funding for the lodging there of arriving refugees, and for the setting up of soup kitchens, was reportedly generated at a meeting convened over September and October of Zhili, Shandong and Henan natives in the city. Rather upbeat articles followed these meetings, which had apparently produced "signs of a positive outcome (*yi you meimu*)" as Harbin officials and the merchant-community decided to rent out several large

[124] *Shihua*, 5 Sept. 1920. *Yishi bao*, 11 Sept. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 25 Nov. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 7 Dec. 1920.
[125] *Shihua*, 30 July 1920.
[126] *Yuandong bao*, 14 Sept. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 16 Sept. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 29 Sept. 1920.
[127] The grain was selling for $1.3 per *dou* in local markets that week. *Yuandong bao*, 21 Sept. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 24 Sept. 1920.

spaces as winter approached to house the poor, and to "drum up (*guchui*)" donations from society at large for winter distributions of clothes and food as well as to finance the return of refugees in the spring.[128] Although it is unclear whether the establishments in Fujiadian where most refugees appeared to have been taken were the ones reportedly rented out above, one December report intimated that lodging in Fujiadian was indeed covered by organizers of the municipal relief operation, relating how a "hard up (*jiongfa*)" batch of alighting refugees at the rail station, "unable to look for food or lodging on their own," were transported in a fleet of carts mobilized by police and put up (*anzhi*) at inns (*kezhan*) in Fujiadian.[129] Heart-wrenching news stories on refugee deaths – in one November case the father of a newly-arrived family lodging at the hostels on Taigu Street died of illness in front of his wailing wife and son – relate how afterwards the local charity society (*cishan hui*) was summoned and promptly furnished a coffin and a burial site.[130] Then, responding to the sight of refugees offering their children up for sale on the streets of the city, a prominent member of the Harbin gentry announced in early December a plan to donate an unspecified "large" sum of money and, along with other charity figures (*cishan dajia*), urge the municipal government to join them in opening a home for children refugees and orphans.[131]

Fujiadian soup kitchens

In late October, the Jilin Government reportedly set up a soup kitchen in Binjiang County (which included Fujiadian, or Daowai, the Chinese section of Harbin) for refugees with an initial

[128] *Yuandong bao*, 24 Sept. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 2 Oct. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 2 Oct. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 13 Oct. 1920.
[129] *Shengjing shibao*, 29 Oct. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 9 Oct. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 31 Oct. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 12 Dec. 1920.
[130] *Yuandong bao*, 27 Nov. 1920.
[131] *Yuandong bao*, 4 Dec. 1920.

$5,000 from the provincial finance bureau.[132] This was followed by a food facility established by the city's charity society (*cishan hui*), a group that attracted sufficient coverage in the press to allow for a closer look at its operation. For its 1920-21 winter season the charity society chose a temple – the Zushimiao – on Ninth Street (Jiudaojie) in Fujiadian, where most incoming refugees had congregated throughout the fall, although the soup kitchen appears not have gotten off the ground until mid-January, when it was apparently overwhelmed with the needy, serving twice daily from 9-12am and 4-6pm. That same month, city merchant-gentry (*shenshang*) reportedly responded to the crowds at the facility by opening additional soup kitchens in the same Fujiadian district, funding them with benefit theatrical performances (*yiwu xi*), one of which brought in $3,000. Donations to the original facility on Ninth Street were also furnished in kind, with a total of 41 shi of millet and coarse rice given by nine donors in the first week of its operation. On a day in late January, 6,000 attended the Ninth Street kitchen, nearly exhausting supplies and leading to a call for more donations (and a follow-up report reprimanding a few "not completely destitute people [*fei jinqiong min*]" taking advantage of the free meals each day, including some allegedly using it as chicken and duck feed). The charity society also special-ordered the production of 1,000 items of clothing for the area poor at the Chinese New Year (when the wives of the city police chief and a city inspector each arrived with 750 jin of flour for the society to distribute to soup kitchen attendees in celebration of the holiday). It also appears to have closed its feeding facility for a few days after New Year's, after which, upon resumption in mid-February, the group responded to the appearance of unspecified illnesses among refugees attending the facility by bringing in a physician to check on attendees and emphasize sanitation

[132] *Shengjing shibao*, 31 Oct. 1920.

and health measures (*zhong weisheng*).[133]

Other soup kitchen efforts in the city included one outside the East Gate by a charity society (*cishan she*) formed by devotees of the Lijiao sect, which solicited donations of cash and grain for its operation set up in its neighborhood of Huifangli.[134] A poor relief facility (*pinmin yangji suo*) in the same Fujiadian district above reportedly gave out free food and clothes each winter, and was preparing to do so again in January.[135] Bulk donations of grain for distribution to refugees were also recognized in the press, such as the 1,000 *shi*, or 120,000 *jin*, of grain given for the benefit of refugees in the area of Binjiang County in late Fall by resident Hu Runze, after which the county petitioned the province to in turn request recognition from the Interior Ministry in Beijing for his contribution (in the form of a fourth class "Excellent Crop Decoration (*jiahezhang*)" out of nine classes, an award conferred by authorities to the public-spirited as far back as the Qing).[136]

Fujiadian and the zone

As we have seen in Mukden and Changchun, relief societies formed among various social circles in the city to mobilize and relieve the famine itself. One small effort was launched on the 25th of October by Harbin's merchant-gentry (*shenshang*), a relief society (*jiuji hui*) that remitted funds to the Zhili, Shandong and Henan famine zones. Over three days the group fundraised in

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[133] *Yuandong bao*, 19 Nov. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 24 Nov. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 1 Jan. 1921. *Yuandong bao*, 7 Jan. 1921. *Yuandong bao*, 18 Jan. 1921. *Yuandong bao*, 22 Jan. 1921. *Yuandong bao*, 23 Jan. 1921. *Yuandong bao*, 25 Jan. 1921. *Yuandong bao*, 26 Jan. 1921. *Yuandong bao*, 28 Jan. 1921. *Yuandong bao*, 30 Jan. 1921. *Yuandong bao*, 15 Feb. 1921.

[134] The sect was founded by two men in 1913 Beijing, according to historian Yong Shao, with the aim of promoting abstinence from tobacco and alcohol and works of charity. It spread to other cities in the country, but was most prevalent in north China and in the Northeast. A YMCA study in 1920 found 31 Lijiao organizations in Beijing, and determined that most members were from the city's lower classes. *Yuandong bao*, 6 Feb. 1921. Shao Yong, *Huidao*, 165-66.

[135] *Yuandong bao*, 5 Jan. 1921.

[136] *Yuandong bao*, 23 Dec. 1920.

eight city districts – in what manner, the report does not say – netting roughly $300 from each for a total of $3,000 for remittance to the zone.[137] The counterpart to the larger city-wide relief societies we have seen in other major cities was the Binjiang County Relief Society (*yizhen hui*) formed from the ranks of military, civil, education, police, gentry and merchant circles in late October. Based in the Fujiadian district by the chamber of commerce building, the group had a stated goal of raising $50,000 from Binjiang County residents, a figure its chair, Wu Ziqing, quickly revised to $100,000.[138] Revealing its closeness to the provincial administration, the society arranged for staff of all provincial organs (*ge jiguan*) to take pay cuts of 20 percent for the months of October through December to benefit famine relief (a move that was reported in Shenyang's *Shengjing shibao*, informing state employees down south that their Harbin counterparts were sharing in the sacrifice).[139]

A mid-November news article on this Binjiang relief society is worth mentioning in detail since it reveals some of the dynamic and mechanics behind the effort. Group organizers realized that many Harbin merchants, being natives of Zhili, had already subscribed to fundraising campaigns by their native-place association in town, the Zhili *tongxiang hui*, and had done so apparently at completely voluntary levels of giving. Drawing up what appeared to be a policy of tiered contributions according to perceived ability, as we saw in Changchun, the Binjiang County relief society organizers planned to apply the contribution quotas to donors to the Zhili native-place association effort and approach those whose donations before had not reached their now-determined quota.[140] Significant here is both the policy of what appeared to be mandatory contributions from the public, as we saw in Changchun, and the fact that it was the

[137] *Yuandong bao*, 26 Oct. 1920.
[138] *Shengjing shibao*, 27 Oct. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 29 Oct. 1920.
[139] *Yuandong bao*, 28 Oct. 1920. *Shengjing shibao*, 29 Oct. 1920.
[140] *Yuandong bao*, 14 Nov. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 18 Dec. 1920.

native-place association of Zhili, and perhaps of other provinces and prefectures in the famine zone, that was first in Harbin to mobilize relief resources. A mid-November accounting determined that the Harbin relief society had accrued $15,000 through the Zhili native-place association, $5,000 through a local company, $7,000 from fundraising in a section of Daowai district, and $10,000 from another district.[141] In December, another accounting determined that the effort had amassed $70,000, of which $30,000 had been remitted to the zone – although after unexplained delays criticized in the papers – and the rest was reportedly spent on food and clothing for arriving refugees.[142]

In early January, the group decided to exhaust its reserves by sending twenty train cars (*huoche*)[143] of grain to each of the five afflicted provinces.[144] Follow-up reports confirm that the group sent a total of one hundred train cars of sorghum to the famine zone in mid-January, twenty each directly to unspecified parts of Zhili and Shandong, the other sixty into the hands of a relief society in Beijing – rendered as the *Huabei zaizhen zong hui*, which was presumably Liang Shiyi's organization – for distribution in Henan, Shanxi and Shaanxi. Afterwards, the society's committee reportedly convened for another round of fundraising.[145]

Relief was independently dispatched to the famine zone by other Harbin-based relief efforts over the crisis year. In mid-November, a relief society composed of railroad employees (*tielu zhenji hui*, presumably staff of the Sino-Russian Chinese Eastern Railway headquartered in Harbin) raised funds within their ranks and sent its own relief shipment of assorted grains on one train (*lie*) of 30 rail cars to Beijing with its own agent to oversee its distribution in an unspecified

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[141] *Yuandong bao*, 10 Nov. 1920.
[142] *Yuandong bao*, 30 Nov. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 3 Dec. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 17 Dec. 1920.
[143] News articles only rarely specified whether the numbers of trains (*huoche*) given referred to full trains (*lie*) or train cars (*liang*); the difference, of course, in grain volume would be huge. In light of such large numbers given, we should safely assume here, and below, that the writers referred to train cars.
[144] *Yuandong bao*, 13 Jan. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 14 Jan. 1921.
[145] *Yuandong bao*, 20 Jan. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 1 Feb. 1921.

part of the zone.[146] Presumably related to the above effort, the leadership of the regional railway (*tielu duban*, again probably the Chinese Eastern) reportedly wrote the management of its railroad factory in Harbin in early November for them to mobilize (*quanmou*) contributions from factory workers of $1 each for an estimated $4,000 to $5,000.[147] The Zhili native-place association of Harbin used $12,000 raised in the early days of January 1921 to send 22 train cars' worth of assorted relief grains through the provincial government.[148] Finally, individuals were also know to dispatch considerable relief to the zone, such as Geng Runzhai across the provincial border in Heilongjiang who, as winter loomed in 1920, used $5,000 of his own money for the purchase of millet for "the old and young facing starvation and the cold" in his native place of Zhuo County, central Zhili.[149]

Before we turn to more activity in the province of Heilongjiang itself, though, contributions by Harbin's large Russian community might be mentioned, such as the ten train-cars' worth of flour donated and sent to unspecified parts of the famine zone as early as mid-October by a wealthy Russian merchant rendered Sikejieli in the Chinese press.[150] The following month, unidentified Harbin Russians sent 1,400 bao of relief flour, possibly 224,000 jin, down the South Manchurian Railway to Tianjin where, unsure what relief agency to entrust it to, they had it stored temporarily at the train station.[151] And over the fall, Russian musicians and dancing troupes in Harbin were also reportedly active in fundraising for the relief of north China's stricken provinces.[152]

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[146] *Yuandong bao*, 9 Nov. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 14 Nov. 1920.
[147] *Yuandong bao*, 5 Nov. 1920.
[148] *Yuandong bao*, 7 Jan. 1921.
[149] *Zhenzai ribao*, 19 Nov. 1920.
[150] *Yuandong bao*, 13 Oct. 1920.
[151] *Da gongbao*, 21 Nov. 1920.
[152] *Da gongbao*, 10 Oct. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 1 Dec. 1920.

Heilongjiang

Since the ultimate destination for most of the refugee-migrants heading to Harbin was in fact Heilongjiang Province to the north, the provincial leadership would become active organizing refugee reception across provincial lines in Harbin. Beforehand, Heilongjiang military governor Sun Liechen assigned the heads of the gold mining bureau, Dong Liuzhuang, and the forestry bureau, Zhu Peilan, both of whose positions were subordinate to the provincial Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce, to coordinate the arrival of refugees in Qiqihar, the provincial capital and very-much a Chinese city compared to Harbin to the south; there, the officials used a set of barracks designed for prisoners-of-war and a second designed for garrison soldiers as temporary lodging and canteens, while local charities were reportedly raising funds for other unspecified relief measures.[153] News reports were particularly vague from the city and depicted some delay and confusion: one from mid-October related that military governor Sun planned to operate soup kitchens "in the province" from winter through to spring and that refugees would be split among the counties, but that refugees were currently crowding into Qiqihar "idling away (*wu suo shishi*)" and that relief funds, already raised, had not yet been disbursed to the counties.[154] Within a few weeks, on the 1st of November, Sun dispatched mining chief Dong and a new foresty chief, surnamed Yu, down to Harbin to set up a reception facility (*zhaodaisuo*) to manage the arrival of migrant-refugees there, before assigning them counties for settlement; reports noted that the operation was following a set of instructions to the provincial government from Zhang Zuolin at his headquarters in Fengtian.[155] As head of the reception facility, Dong received advance cables with the age and sex breakdowns of refugees en route to Harbin, while officers from the municipal police bureau and Binjiang County met the arriving

[153] *Shuntian shibao*, 6 Oct. 1920. *Jingbao*, 6 Oct. 1920.
[154] *Yuandong bao*, 19 Oct. 1920.
[155] *Jichang ribao*, 2 Nov. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 2 Nov. 1920.

migrants, apparently making sure they did not roam around Harbin.[156] By the beginning of December, the dispersal of refugees along the Chinese Eastern Railway to points in the interior was well underway, with, in one example, sixty rail cars of migrant-refugees passing through Harbin in mid-December, forking east on the branch leading through an expanse of woodlands to the Russian border.[157]

Once the migrants detrained and headed into the interior, they were entering what was very much a frontier. "There are no roads in North Manchuria," an American consular official wrote as late as 1926, "but overland traffic is carried over trails which existed prior to the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway." Travel by cart, or motorcar, was in fact best in the winter when the ground was frozen and streams and swamps were iced over, and the region had relatively light snowfall compared to neighboring regions.[158] Still, some of the communities migrants were entering exhibited charitable organization similar to those found in larger population centers further south. The charity society (*cishan hui*) of Suihua County, for example, 60 miles due north of Harbin, reportedly expanded in September 1920 to include a sub-branch in Yong'an town in the county's western district; the following month, Li Xuekong, a member of the gentry (*shenshi*) of Tieli town to the northeast of Suihua, reportedly sent word to Suihua that he had followed suit by organizing a charity society there, setting up, with donated funds, a poor shelter (*yangjisuo*) and charity loan office (*yidian*), presumably offering low-interest or interest-free loans to poor farmers or peddlers.[159]

Liu Yanqing, the newly-installed magistrate of Tonghe County lying about one hundred miles east of Harbin along the Songhua (Sungari) River, convened with area merchant-gentry

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[156] *Yuandong bao*, 17 Nov. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 16 Nov. 1920.
[157] *Yuandong bao*, 2 Dec. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 12 Dec. 1920.
[158] Julean Arnold, *China: A Commercial and Industrial Handbook*, Trade Promotion Series No. 38 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1926), 673.
[159] *Yuandong bao*, 24 Sept. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 12 Oct. 1920.

(*shenshang*) to organize a two-day charity benefit performance (*yiwu xi*) in November, with proceeds to be remitted to the famine zone. A second fundraising drive was meant to benefit arriving refugees. (The report quoted the magistrate as asking rhetorically, "With each province and each county [*gesheng gexian*] in the country all mobilizing relief, how can Tonghe bear falling behind [*qi ken luo*]?")[160]

Closer to Harbin, Hulan County just to its north saw the creation of a refugee relief society (*zaimin jiuji hui*) by county merchants at the start of December, to which a local garrison commander reportedly donated 150 *shi*, or 18,000 *jin*, of millet.[161] Then in neighboring Zhaodong County, right up the westward rail line from Harbin, the head of the charity society (*cishan hui*), surnamed Chen, was reportedly drumming up support for famine relief for the provinces down south on the street of his county town later in mid-January.[162] Months earlier, officials some 500 miles up the rail line on the border with western Siberia were, despite their isolation, some of the first in Heilongjiang to organize relief for the famine zone; there in October, at what was then called Manchurian Station (Manzhan, or Manzhouli), railway police commander Geng Yutian answered a fundraising call from military governor Sun Liechen and met with military and police officials to organize three-days' worth of charity performances at a teahouse in the border town starting the 7th of November, proceeds to go to the famine zone.[163] Similarly, frontier police in Heihe, the border town 300 miles due north of Harbin on the Amur River facing Siberia, responded to Sun's provincial call for relief monies by bringing together military men and officials there to hold benefit performances at two local theaters in November,

[160] *Yuandong bao*, 23 Nov. 1920.
[161] *Yuandong bao*, 3 Dec. 1920.
[162] *Yuandong bao*, 18 Jan. 1921.
[163] *Jichang ribao*, 28 Oct. 1920. *Shengjing shibao*, 30 Oct. 1920.

raising $11,000 over three days for relief of districts below the Great Wall.[164]

Closing

From late August to the end of December 1920, over the first four months of the famine, the warlord regimes of Zhili and Fengtian coordinated and subsidized a remarkably smooth transfer of population into the sparsely settled Northeast. By New Year's Day, 1921, the three provinces of Fengtian, Jilin and Heilongjiang were hosts to an officially estimated one million refugee-migrants from the south, divided among the provinces, the counties, and finally their sub-districts according to a settlement plan drawn up by governor general Zhang Zuolin, and, it appears, one largely carried out by local officials and communities on the ground.[165] Several hundred thousand others had migrated elsewhere in the country, and while it was not unheard of for local officials to defy provincial orders to allow refugees to alight in their districts, such a phenomenon appears to have been an exception to the rule. By the New Year, Zhangjiakou by the Great Wall was host to well over 10,000 refugees, Tianjin hosted more than 40,000, Hankou on the Yangzi hosted some 30,000, and thousands more had made it to Shanghai, where as early as November local benevolence halls had set up soup kitchens expressly for those fleeing the North, charities had moved up the dates for their annual winter distributions of grain and clothing in light of their arrival, and police and benevolence halls had raised funds to finance their onward travel by boat or train to Jiangxi, Nanjing, and other parts of the country.[166]

In the meantime, substantial sums were mobilized for relief across the social strata of communities in the Northeast as far flung as the Amur river facing Russian Siberia and the Mongolian steppe. Money was raised through benefit concerts, fundraising meetings, or, in some

[164] *Yuandong bao*, 23 Nov. 1920.
[165] *Yuandong bao*, 30 Dec. 1920.
[166] *Shibao*, 2 Nov. 1920. *Zhenzai ribao*, 14 Nov. 1920. *Zhenzai ribao*, 26 Nov. 1920.

cases, exacting contributions from district families based on household wealth. It should be stressed that there was no central clearinghouse for relief funds generated in the three northeastern provinces, or anywhere in the country, for that matter; in most cases, money was remitted to the stricken provinces through native banks or through provincial government agencies; in other cases, funds raised locally were used to acquire grain in the Northeast for direct shipment to the disaster zone by relief initiators themselves, which appeared to be the most common route taken, for example, by native-place associations. Unfortunately, tracking and tallying relief totals for the region over the year is simply impossible in light of the myriad channels active in dispatching relief to the five-province famine zone. Taking what we have seen here in the Northeast with the indigenous relief activity we saw in parts of the Zhili famine field in chapter two, and the mobilization of the Beijing communities to the plight of refugees in chapter three, it becomes clear that substantial parts of Chinese society were engaged with the task of relieving the vast famine zone over several months in the fall of 1920 well before the international community began its relief operation in earnest in mid-winter. Now we will turn to the late winter and early spring of 1921, which comprise the second half of the famine and the period emphasized in the current literature on the event, largely because of the intensity of foreign activity. Our purpose will be three-fold: to sketch the remainder of the overall relief effort; to provide the larger financial and diplomatic backdrop to the crisis; and to explore the second phase of officially-sponsored migration to the Northeast.

Chapter Five

Spring: the central state and the foreign presence in 1921

In the first few days of 1921, a driver led a cart of grain southward over the frozen soil of Heilongjiang, down from the wheat and sorghum fields of the north Manchurian plain. Following the web of cart-paths over which much of the province's foodstuffs and furs moved in the early Republic, the driver would soon descend onto one of the region's many riverbanks, where goods continued by raft or sled, depending on the season, to the major market and rail-hub at Harbin. A distance of 20 *li* and the Sungari river lay between the driver and his destination. So did one hundred refugees from the south. The driver's load never made it to market in Harbin, but news of the assault did. Their "hunger unbearable," the refugees set upon the cart from all directions, making off with every last grain as the hapless driver returned punches and insults. "Feedings had been cut off" before the refugees made their strike, the city's *Yuandong bao* newsdaily explained. Provincial authorities had apparently reversed their policy of feeding those fleeing the famine-stricken south, and many in Heilongjiang, the frigid expanse north of the Sungari, were presumably left to fend for themselves.[1]

After a mostly uninterrupted flow of refugee-migrants over the four months since the start of the north China famine, Heilongjiang military governor Sun Liechen had cabled Marshal Zhang Zuolin in Mudken in late December 1920, asking him to cut off the flow of refugees into China's northernmost province. Sun's stated reason was that the bitter cold was threatening the lives of refugees en route, either on the icy roads or in the open boxcars used to convey refugees along the railroad. By January 1, 1921, the number of famine refugees in the Northeast exceeded a million, by official count, many of whom had been divided among counties and districts across

[1] *Yuandong bao*, 7 Jan. 1921.

the three provinces of Fengtian, Jilin and Heilongjiang through a quota system mandated by Zhang, who, as inspector general of the Northeastern provinces, was their highest political authority. While official and charity soup kitchens for refugees were active through the winter in the Chinese section of Harbin, official food services for still-arriving refugees appear to have been suspended further north in Heilongjiang, as the above article suggests, to eliminate the northward draw of refugees to the province. Sun's communique was followed a few days later by a cable to authorities in the south from Zhang instructing them to stop the migration of another 200,000 refugees reportedly poised to continue the journey into the Northeast.[2]

This halt to refugee traffic into the Northeast would ultimately last, though, only several weeks. Negotiations were already underway between the Shandong and Zhili authorities and their counterparts in the Northeast to launch an agricultural colonization project designed to attract another 200,000 migrants to Heilongjiang by the spring, the first of whom would set out in late January, this time in covered coaches instead of open box cars, by order of the Minister of Communications. This pause in migration to the Northeast, which coincided with the closing of Hankou to refugees fleeing south of the famine zone seen in the last chapter, also marks the midpoint of the nine-month famine crisis, and the beginning of its second stage leading to the spring harvest.

The majority of this study has been devoted to the first half of the 1920-21 famine for the very reason that relief activity in this first stage of the crisis is almost entirely absent from existing narratives of the famine. Yet it was the joint foreign-Chinese "international" efforts that occupied center stage in the narratives offered by scholarly and missionary writings, despite the fact that they did not mobilize in earnest till January 1921 and later, as we will see below. In this chapter we will cover the period of return for refugees to their home districts in late winter and

[2] *Yuandong bao*, 28 Dec. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 31 Dec. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 30 Dec. 1920.

spring, primarily concerning ourselves with the major institutional players in China over the famine year of 1920-21. We will start with the Beiyang regime, which, in control of China's cash-strapped central government, nonetheless served as facilitator, and sponsor, of grain movement over its railways throughout the crisis while, at the same time, navigating the diplomatic obstacles standing in the way of raising customs revenue for famine relief. Afterwards we will sketch the relatively orderly mid-winter refugee return to home districts from Zhangjiakou and Tianjin, ordered by the Interior Ministry and carried out by police and military officials with the cooperation of various charities. Next, we will sketch a program to settle the outer reaches of Heilongjiang near Siberia with several hundred thousand refugee-colonists launched by central and provincial authorities in January. Finally, we aim to shed light on various aspects of the foreign relief interventions during the famine, examining in turn each of its three main forms: a relief depot in central Zhili run by a main international society; the missionaries, whose prominent voices at the time despite their insular perspective led to a distorted understanding of social relief in the interior; and the American Red Cross, the largest purely foreign relief operation in China that year whose exclusive focus on work relief, in what it saw as an effort to "modernize" Chinese disaster relief, acted as another set of blinders on foreigners to what the Chinese were in fact accomplishing in their midst.

Diplomacy & finance

Since the onset of the food crisis in September, both official and extragovernmental agents seeking tax-free status for shipments of relief supplies, such as grain, coal, and clothing, were required to apply for freight passports (*huzhao*) from provincial authorities. On the whole, these relief supplies crisscrossed the country free-of-charge on the state rail network, incurring

$8,686,491 in freight transport losses for the Chinese Government Railway from September 1920 to the following June, nearly half of which applied to material moving down the Peking-Mukden line from the Northeast.[3] Freight volumes across China consequently soared compared to previous years. In January of 1921, for example, the Beijing-Mukden railway alone conveyed 65,350 tons, or 106,428,000 *jin*, of Manchurian grain – both for relief organs and the general market – to Tianjin and other cities "below the wall," a six-fold increase against the 9,541 tons and 10,434 tons on the same line the two previous Januaries. Praise for the management of the state railways came from some of the harshest critics of native governance, including Shanghai's *North China Herald*, which in March 1921 conceded that "in performance records the managers [of the Chinese state rail system] have nothing of which to be ashamed."[4]

Money, not grain or the rail cars to move it, was the pressing need in 1920-21. "By about 1920, the Peking government was deeply and irreparably in debt," Andrew Nathan has written. "A statement provided by the Ministry of Finance showed a total unsecured debt, domestic and foreign, of Mex. $299 million as of September 30, 1921."[5] The warlord inheritors of Yuan Shikai's Beiyang regime ruled then over a central state riddled with debt obligations, but only a portion of this was a product of their own making. Recognized and propped up by the treaty powers at the expense of Sun Yat-sen's Canton experiment as a convenient liaison for their varied demands, the Chinese state circa 1920 was a vehicle for the servicing of debts on loans taken out to meet Qing-era war indemnities that had consumed crippling amounts of state

[3] Edwards, ed., *North China Famine*, 175.
[4] "A recent cable despatch from America contained an estimate from Mr. Herbert Hoover," the paper explained, referring to the future American president who had been active in post-war famine relief in Belgium. "From [Hoover's] experience with European and American railways, [he had] stated that the Chinese would be unable to deliver more than 2,000 tons a day. The fact that they are doing nearly 100 percent better than this indicates that in performance records the managers have nothing of which to be ashamed." *North China Herald*, 5 March 1921.
[5] Nathan, *Peking Politics*, 75.

revenue just as relief demands were reaching awful heights.[6] ("All Foreign Loan and Indemnity obligations secured on the Customs Revenues including the Service of the Reorganization Loan have been fully met," ran a news brief in Shanghai at the height of famine in March 1921, after which the foreign inspector general "released" over 23 million Shanghai silver taels to the "Central Government" in Beijing.)[7]

Worse, while the administrative apparatus nominally running the country from Beijing under Cao Kun was in dire fiscal straits, its control over state revenue was steadily evaporating. Of the $209 million that was, on paper at least, generated for the central state in the fiscal year before our famine by maritime and native customs, the state salt monopoly, wine and tobacco taxes, and stamp duties, only some 70 percent, by one accounting, was actually remitted by the provinces to Beijing.[8] After debt payments and military expenses – including $98 million to domestic and foreign creditors in 1919-20 – the central government was reportedly left with a mere five percent of its nominal income for its daily operation. It was in this fiscal bind that the Ministry of Communications absorbed the $8 million in freight costs over government railways in 1920-21, exacerbating debts that would reach $723 million in 1922, when, to put them into perspective, the annual income left for the daily operation of the ministry stood, rather astonishingly, at a mere one percent of its outstanding debt.[9]

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[6] See Albert Feuerwerker, *The Chinese Economy, 1870-1949* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1995), 82-5.
[7] *Celestial Empire*, 5 March 1921.
[8] One sources provides an incomplete breakdown of this total nominal revenue in 1919-20 as follows: only $2 million in native customs revenue around the capital and $700,000 from elsewhere was remitted to the central government; $49.3 was remitted to Beijing by the salt monopoly (while $30 million was kept by various provinces and $10.3 was spent on collection); only ten percent of $14 million in wine and tobacco taxes and $3 million in stamp duties made it to Beijing; finally, the $93 million raised by the maritime customs was remitted in full. James Allen DeForce, "Budgets of Far Eastern Countries," *Trade Information Bulletin No. 299* (Washington: U.S. Department of Commerce, 1924), 12.
[9] Financial figures for this period are notoriously hazy. Put another way, in October of 1921 the inspector general of the Chinese customs, Sir Francis Aglen, put the central government's total debts at $364,000,000. The annual interest charge alone of 8 percent on this debt–$29,120,000– was well more than the "total receipts for a year at the disposal of the Central Government." Nathan, *Peking Politics*, 76.

With the central Chinese state struggling to meet payroll, prominent relief planners in Beijing turned to previous sources of funds for relief projects in the country: international finance. After the recent world war, the treaty powers, pursuant to a proposal of the United States, had formed a united front for the purpose of offering loans to the Chinese government. This consortium of banking concerns from the United States, Britain, Japan and France was intended, as Akira Iriye explains, "to be given a retroactive and current option on all loans to China. By this means a new system of international cooperation to assist China would replace competitive disorderly arrangements."[10] In 1920, Beijing, in other words, was precluded from going through other international channels for loans.

It was in this context that a week before holding the inaugural "international" relief meeting in late September 1920 at his Beijing residence with prominent Chinese and members of the diplomatic community, Xiong Xiling drew up a foreign loan proposal on behalf of his newly-formed Beiwusheng relief society. A former premier of the Republic, Xiong was a seasoned negotiator and respected relief administrator, having been instrumental in securing millions of dollars in foreign financing for several years of river works after the devastating Zhili floods of 1917.[11] Xiong approached the official point man for negotiations with the "Diplomatic Body," the collective of resident foreign powers in Beijing. In late 1920, this happened to be the Spanish minister to Beijing, Don Luis Pastor, who served at the time as the dean, or doyen, of the Body, a

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[10] At an October 1920 meeting in New York, members of the banking consortium closed in on the last of China's tangible resources not already pledged that year as security for outstanding loans: the land tax. As late as April 1921, the State Department warned the Consortium representatives against entertaining such a plan any further, particularly their proposal to "reorganize" the land tax "under a foreign chief inspector of Japanese nationality." Noting that any foreign designs on the land tax was "interpreted in Chinese official as well as Chinese banking circles as a destructive bomb with a time fuse," Hollington K. Kong, a regular contributor to *Millard's*, the influential Shanghai-based American news magazine, deemed it a Japanese conspiracy to sabotage the US-led consortium. *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1920*, Vol. 1 (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1935), 585, 664. *Papers, 1921*, Vol. 1 (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1936), 363. *Millard's*, 6 Nov. 1920. Akira Iriye, *After Imperialism: the Search for a New Order in the Far East, 1921-1931* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 14.

[11] Chihli River Commission, "Final Report and Grand Scheme, 1918-1925" (Tianjin: Hua Pei Press, 1926?), 4-8.

rotating post. Noting that it was a "common practice in foreign countries" to raise funds through surcharges on transport fares, Xiong, along with colleague Wang Daxie, another former premier, proposed a $50 million loan from European and American financiers, with the surcharges as security. Most of China's state railroad was underwritten by foreign loans, the men noted, and the country's shipping lines were also foreign-owned, so any "agreement for imposing such surcharges can only be arrived at by our Government by taking up the matter with the Diplomatic Body."[12] The men were promptly rebuffed, however, instructed to go through the "proper channel of communication, that is, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs," while "personally" dean Pastor was "somewhat doubtful whether, in their present form" their proposals "would prove acceptable to the Diplomatic Body."[13]

A week later, American Minister Charles Crane – who had just sent a desperate cable to an ailing President Woodrow Wilson in Washington on the subject of the unfolding famine – received a loan proposal from Yan Huiqing (aka W. W. Yen), head of the Chinese Foreign Ministry. Yan explained that "contributions" to the Government Relief Bureau were "inadequate" and that there was a "necessity of proposing" a 10 percent surtax for one year on both maritime and native customs, with the sums "utilized exclusively for famine relief purposes." The son of an American-educated Episcopal pastor and a Christian mother, a graduate of the University of Virginia, and professor of English at St. John's College in Shanghai, and fresh from serving as Chinese envoy to Copenhagen,[14] Yan had a considerably narrower cultural bridge to cross in his dealings with the legations than many of his counterparts in the Beiyang government, affirming that the funds raised would be "under the effective management of the Inspector General of Customs," a foreigner. He

[12] Wang and Xiong to Pastor, letter, 22 Sept 1920, SDF 893.48g/30.
[13] Pastor to Wang and Xiong, letter, 23 Sept 1920, SDF 893.48g/30.
[14] Howard Boorman, *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China*, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967-79), 50-52.

also acknowledged that the duty of five percent *ad valorem* was "explicitly sanctioned by Treaty arrangements" but requested that an exception be made as a charitable "extra-treaty action" to raise it to five and a half percent.[15]

Initially, there was enthusiastic response in the treaty port press. Within a week of Yan's appeal to the legations, an editorial in the *Peking & Tientsin Times*, the British-run self-described "official organ for the British, French and Russian municipalities" in the North,[16] put blame squarely on what it called Japanese resistance to altering China's flat rate import tariff, arguing that it would be "absolutely preposterous" not to allow China to "exercise… its sovereignty" over the "Customs surpluses, which are indubitably China's property." "The Treaty Powers are not justified in opposing the Chinese government's proposal," the paper declared. Complicating matters, though, Yan's proposal had been submitted "within a few days of the announcement that Generals Chang Tso-lin and Tsao Kun have intimidated Peking into promising each of them a grant of three million dollars per annum," the paper noted, "to enable them to raise and maintain additional Army Divisions."[17] By the end of the month, the paper had changed its position, arguing that China had sufficient millionaires – former statesmen and warlords among them – to match the sought-after loan from the Powers, and there was no "guarantee" anyway that such a loan would not be "calmly requisitioned by the militarists for the use of their Armies." Here, it should be mentioned that substantial sums in donations to relief efforts had begun materializing as early as the first few weeks of the crisis, such as $1,600,000 total from three commercial

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[15] Yan to Crane, 1 Oct. 1920, SDF 893.48g/15.

[16] The British paper, with a circulation of 1,000, had considerably more influence than its American counterpart in Tianjin, the *North China Star*, despite the latter's larger circulation of 2,500. Intelligence reports prepared for American Minister Charles Crane by his consuls in Tianjin often parroted viewpoints expressed in its pages, performing the footwork for American officials on the ground, however dubious or politicized its claims might be. (Chinese officials have "recently gone into the grain business" to take advantage of famine prices, Consul Stuart Fuller wrote in one December example, attaching, as evidence, a *Peking & Tientsin Times* article that day alleging the same.) Sanger, "Advertising Methods," 65. Fuller to Crane, letter, 13 Dec. 1920, SDF 893.48g/90. *Peking & Tientsin Times*, "Famine Relief and Profiteering," 13 Dec. 1920.

[17] *Peking & Tientsin Times*, 8 Oct 1920.

sources and an estate in Shanghai,[18] $500,000 bequeathed by the late military governor of Jiangsu, Li Chun, for relief efforts in his hometown of Tianjin,[19] and $2,000,000 from Zhili Governor Cao Rui, brother of the military governor, Cao Kun, which, as an editorial in Shanghai's *North China Herald* remarked, "if this comes out of his private pocket, it is indeed a munificent gift." (This would have been ten percent of the $20 million in assets owned by Cao Rui roughly in this period, according to an estimate by a Japanese historian, while Cao Kun may have been worth $4 million. How the uneducated sons of a Tianjin cloth peddler and, in the case of Cao Kun, the one-time drinking partner of president Yuan Shikai, were able to amass one of the largest family fortunes in Zhili is another matter. For his part, Zhang Zuolin owned in one estimate about $50 million in land, grain, railroad, pawnshop and other business interests at this time.)[20] Total relief needs for the year, though, were estimated at $200 million.

"You will recall that this Government's acceptance of the surtax was conditional on its being imposed on all countries alike," the State Department telegrammed Crane in Beijing at the New Year, alluding to a dispute holding up the various foreign signatories to the famine loan agreement. The same day the British consul-general informed dean Pastor that it remained the "unanimous opinion" among his "colleagues" that out of fear of Chinese mismanagement

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[18] *North China Herald*, 25 Sept. 1920.

[19] Such princely sums from the estates of the deceased produced tugs of war over their management, as what happened with this sum. American consul Stuart Fuller, vice president of the city's international relief society, charged that officials in Tianjin had "developed a case of the itching palm" and "brought pressure to bear to have this money turned over, not to the international treasury, but to themselves or to the officials who were members of the old Chinese Chihli Famine Relief Committee." Writing to American Minister Charles Crane, Fuller alleged that the purely Chinese effort was far less efficient than his own, hiring "over a hundred 'investigators', of dubious qualifications, at generous salaries, as a first step, on a scale which would make the administration cost thirty or forty percent of the donations." In contrast, Fuller estimated that overhead would consume only two percent of funds at his organization. Similarly, the *Peking & Tientsin Times* stated that "So-called Relief Organizations have been multiplied until we have lost count of them, but it would seem that only where foreigners are so strongly represented on the Committee that their views cannot be entirely ignored is anything useful being accomplished." Fuller to Crane, letter, 3 Nov. 1920, SDF 893.48g/260. *Peking & Tientsin Times*, 25 Oct. 1920.

[20] "The Famine in North China," editorial, *North China Herald*, 18 Sept. 1920. Waldron, *War to Nationalism*, 45. McCormack, *Chang Tso-lin*, 201, 301.

"foreign control over the [surtax] proceeds was "eminently desirable."[21] "Conditions of all legations must be met before surtax can be levied," Crane wrote in a follow-up telegram to Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby in early January, three months after the initial proposal to the Powers by the Chinese.[22] Meanwhile, "criminally negligent" Beijing, the *Peking & Tientsin Times* stated, "allows precious weeks to slip" by without a relief plan "worthy of the name." The editors of north China's most influential foreign newspaper had such evident disdain for the Government Relief Bureau that they repeatedly refused to publish the bureau's financial statements, adding to the relative invisibility of official relief efforts to the foreign community. ("We receive from time to time elaborate financial statements, signed by a foreign Auditor, from the National Bureau of Famine Relief," the paper editorialized in January 1921. "We have declined to publish them because we have no confidence in the ability of this Bureau to administer relief, economically or methodically.")[23]

Privately, British Minister Beilby Alston cited additional, altogether different, reasons for the loan's delay. The financial tap to the Beijing government was in the hands of a European who was "slowly drinking himself to death," Alston confided to British Foreign Secretary Earl Curzon. "Last year [Luis Pastor] nearly dead of cholera, and he now frankly says that, though he escaped death at the hand of cholera, the *décanat* will surely kill him. He is totally unfit for the post, and the delays, owing to his inability to attend to business in the transaction of the affairs of

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[21] Davis to Crane, telegram, 29 Dec. 1920. Ker to Pastor, letter, 29 Dec. 1920, SDF 893.48g/117.
[22] Crane to Colby, telegram, 5 Jan. 1921, SDF 893.48g/81.
[23] "The average local official has no idea of how relief works should be undertaken," the paper added by way of explanation. "He makes no systematic investigation of the circumstances of individuals, fearing trouble if he should make any discrimination. Ten thousand dollars handled by a Sino-Foreign Committee will at least mean the saving of some two thousand lives; divided up at the rate of four coppers a piece among the population of the district it affords succor to none. Yet if the Government had had its own way, that is the manner in which the bulk of the four million dollars advanced [by the Customs loan] would have been scattered." In this instance, the paper's decision not to publish official Chinese relief accounts stemmed apparently from the opinion that Chinese officials could not execute effective relief as opposed to fears of corruption. "The Government and Famine Relief," *Peking & Tientsin Times*, 26 Jan. 1921.

the Diplomatic Body, are becoming a public scandal."[24] Meanwhile, correspondence from the Chinese side took on an even more pathetic tone. Around the New Year, Beijing's Government Relief Bureau had redrafted its proposal for the control and distribution of the pending loan monies, a key concern of the foreign side, which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs forwarded to Pastor. "I request Your Excellency to be so good as to transmit [these proposals] to the Ministers of all the Powers resident in Peking," Foreign Minister Yan added, "and to quickly obtain their assent and to send me a reply as soon as possible, so that relief may be granted to the poor Chinese suffering from famine. Such is my hope."[25]

Yan's motivations, writing from an arm of the Chinese government that "carried out China's foreign policy virtually independently of the factional rivalries in Peking," according to Andrew Nathan, were not themselves brought into question.[26] Instead, foreign suspicions were set on north China's main powerbrokers in 1920, Cao Kun and Zhang Zuolin. Yet foreign press and diplomatic depictions over the crisis year belied the surprising symbiosis between the rival militarists – at least in the area of relief and refugee movement. As early as mid-September, Zhang had committed to spending $700,000 on the overall relief effort: $400,000 to purchase sorghum and millet locally to send to the Zhili and Shandong famine zones; $200,000 on the reception of refugees to the northeastern provinces; and $100,000 on the relief of Fengtian counties afflicted by a recent hailstorm.[27] Reports on Zhang Zuolin's role as coordinator of relief for the Zhili zone appeared afterwards throughout late summer and fall, some specifying

[24] Alston, "Foreign mission heads as of January 31, 1921," 7 Feb. 1921, FO 405/230/168,
[25] Presumably from Yan, the letter only bears the Ministry's seal, and is not signed. Chinese Foreign Ministry to Pastor, 10 Jan 1921, SDF 893.48g/159.
[26] "The factions agreed in viewing foreign relations as essentially a technical problem in which all Chinese shared the same interests," Nathan explains. Nathan, *Peking Politics*, 67.
[27] *Jichang ribao*, 15 Sept. 1920.

enormous volumes of grain that cannot be readily confirmed through other sources.[28] Curiously, the $3 million the *Peking & Tientsin Times* reported Zhang Zuolin to be demanding from the central government for military expenses in October 1920 corresponded exactly to what papers in the Northeast were reporting that he was planning to raise there starting that month for famine relief below the Great Wall, cabling the military governors of Jilin and Heilongjiang to launch fundraising and ordering counties in Fengtian to raise monies according to the size of their fall harvests.[29] It is not possible to confirm whether Zhang's planned $3 million for relief was ultimately reached or distributed in full, but the figure would help to account for the massive volumes of relief grain that we have seen running into the famine zone from Manchuria in the hands of native societies two months later in December.

On this warlord relationship, it is also important to point out that official American and British opinions occasionally diverged, and British intelligence even contradicted itself. "As [Zhang Zuolin] insists on the Provincial contributions being given preference over the grain purchased by the joint Chinese and Foreign Famine Committee," British consul Wilkinson wrote his superiors from the Manchurian capital on January 15, 1921, "there has been some dissatisfaction felt by the latter and the Governor has been quite wrongly accused of holding up cars for military and speculative purposes."[30] Three weeks later, an altogether different account made it into the annual report of Britain's main envoy in the country. "Only a mere fraction of

[28] One such report from Harbin's *Yuandong bao* in October stated that Zhang had ordered investigations into the surpluses in the harvests throughout Jilin and Heilongjiang with the aim of mobilizing 5,000,000 *shi* (or 357,142 tons) of sorghum and millet for the famine zone. However massive this amount was, it appears to have been a feasible target since it would have amounted to only 17.8 percent of the average 2,000,000 tons of annual "surplus" grain produced in North Manchuria (beyond local food needs, that is) in the period. A late October report in Changchun's *Jichang ribao* related how counties in the Northeast with healthy harvests would be required to contribute 3,000 *shi*, 2,500 *shi* or 1,500 *shi* of grain, depending on the size of the county. *Da gongbao*, 24 Aug. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 21 Sept. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 22 Sept. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 23 Sept. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 1 Oct. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 3 Oct. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 9 Oct. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 9 Oct. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 16 Oct. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 27 Oct. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 16 Dec. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 17 Dec. 1920. Chinese Eastern Railways, *North Manchuria*, 66.

[29] *Yuandong bao*, 26 Oct. 1920.

[30] Wilkinson, "[Mukden] Intelligence Report for December Quarter, 1920," 15 Jan. 1921, FO 228/3290/43.

the money would be expended on famine relief" if left in the hands of Chinese, British Minister Beilby Alston wrote Foreign Minister Earl Curzon at Whitehall in London. "Relief committees were formed, mainly on foreign initiative," and "owing to the callous indifference of the military tuchuns [*dujun*], Generals Chang Tso-lin and Tsao Kun, railway traffic is considerably interfered with through wagons being held up."[31] As British intelligence made its way up the chain of command, the Chinese leadership's decision to prioritize native relief operations was apparently construed as corruption and callousness. The Cabinet Office in Beijing responded with a sharp rejoinder to the circular logic of such charges in the treaty port press: "By red tape and obstruction you probably mean the inspection of goods transported over the Government railways for famine relief," secretary Xia Qingyi penned in a letter to the editor of the *Peking & Tientsin Times* in the last days of 1920, "but such inspection has for its object the exercise of control to avoid profiteering and corruption suggested by you in the first quotation."[32] In Washington, meanwhile, the administration of Woodrow Wilson received decidedly different accounts from its man in Beijing. "Railway facilities in north China now used almost exclusively for transportation of coal and free transportation of relief supplies," Charles Crane cabled Washington on December 17, 1920. "Military uses at minimum. Practically all moneys raised for this purpose reaches the actual sufferers…"[33]

Over a hundred days passed before signatures were finally put to the $4 million loan, at eight percent interest, on January 19, 1921, sourced in equal shares from the (British) Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank of China, Banque de l'Indo-Chine, Yokohama Specie Bank, and the

[31] Alston to Curzon, "Annual Report, 1920," F.O. 1423/1423/10, in Robert L. Jarman, ed., *China Political Reports, 1911-1960 Vol. 1 1911-1921* (Chippenham, Wilts: Anthony Rove, 2001), 431-455.
[32] *Peking & Tientsin Press*, 3 Jan. 1921.
[33] Crane to State Department, telegram, 17 Dec. 1920. SDF 893.48g/66.

(American) International Banking Corporation.[34] The imposition of the surtax – which would produce $750,000 monthly for the Chinese government[35] – was put off, though, until the first of March "in deference to the views of the Diplomatic Body," which had been pressured to impose a delay of tariff collection by various chambers of commerce.[36] Another condition was that the entire $4 million remain under foreign control, handled by six provincial international relief societies, which received refugees upon their return to their home districts with the approach of spring.[37] Beijing's Government Relief Bureau would handle none of the money.

The Nankai refugee camp

The story of spring relief is perhaps best begun at north China's largest assembly of famine refugees over the winter of 1921, a camp in the district of on the outskirts of Tianjin. There refugees converged in roughly the same spot where in 1917 flood refugees in the tens of thousands – many from the same Zhili counties struck by drought in 1920 – waited out the receding flood waters that had devastated much of the province. As early as September 1920, refugees first started settling on a patch of open, uncultivated land in Nankai, without objection from its owners, according to a report made later in the spring, building huts for themselves out of mud and scavenged materials. The Nankai camp, surrounded by a freshly-dug ditch and a raised mud wall, was not the only refugee gathering in the city – other encampments appeared in

[34] Crane to Colby, telegram, 22 Jan. 1921, SDF 893.48g/97. Obata to Pastor, letter, 4 Dec. 1920, SDF 893.48g/108.
[35] Crane to Colby, telegram, 4 Feb. 1921, SDF 893.48g/113.
[36] "While being in entire sympathy with the raising of funds for Famine Relief," the vice chairman of the Tientsin General Chamber of Commerce wrote the British consul in the city in December, "this Chamber desires, as a matter of record, to protect in principle against the imposition of surtaxes for any purpose whatsoever." The secretary of the American Chamber of Commerce sent a verbatim letter to the US consul there the following month, indicating the existence of a concerted campaign against the surtax by Tianjin's foreign business community. Yan to Pastor, letter, 19 Jan. 1921, SDF 893.48g/144. Greaves to Ker, letter, 3 Dec. 1920, SDF 893.48g/117. Evans to Fuller, letter, 17 Jan. 1921, SDF 893.48g/133.
[37] The Maritime Customs Surtax Loan was ultimately allocated in seven parts to international relief societies: the Metropolitan District and west Zhili ($790,000); east Zhili ($720,000); Henan ($880,000); Shandong ($540,000); Shaanxi ($540,000); Shanxi ($400,000); and Shanghai and Gansu, where a massive earthquake had struck in December 1920 ($160,000). Edwards, ed., *North China Famine*, 22.

the Hedong and Hebei districts – but was by far the largest with 50,000 residents at its peak, most hailing from Zhili communities within a 100 mile radius of the city, according to one tally, mixed together with families from more distant Shandong.[38]

A November investigation determined that a majority of Nankai residents – some sixty percent – could, for the time being, fend for themselves in the outskirts of Tianjin where the camp was located, scavenging for food or stalks and stubble for fuel over the fall and winter.[39] Some pulled rickshaws or otherwise competed for menial jobs with Tianjin's resident poor, who were pinched already by the national economic slump. (Four-fifths of the 400 cotton-weaving shops in Tianjin had shuttered in the past year, according to one local report, due in part to the plummeting purchasing power of residents in the region's famine districts.) The remaining forty percent of camp residents, however, arrived in need of aid to get through the months ahead, and for them "at a comparatively early date, viz. first of October, certain Chinese philanthropists began giving out a limited quantity of steamed bread," a local international relief committee explained in a summary report on the camp published later in the spring.[40] The camp was eventually divided into 14 sections, each sponsored by a charity group paying refugees to erect huts of reed-mats and other materials. A single Chinese relief group sponsored six of the camp's sections, comprising 21,291 residents, or nearly half of the total population. Another six groups – four Chinese, one joint-Chinese/Japanese, and the local relief board of Tianjin's international relief society – took on the maintenance of the remaining eight divisions.

The Nankai camp attracted considerable media attention, such as an autumn parade of military and school bands involving Chinese Boy Scouts and the YWCA to drum up support for

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[38] *Da gongbao*, 7 Nov. 1920.
[39] *Shibao*, 13 Nov. 1920.
[40] Local Relief Board of the North China (Tientsin) International Society for Famine Relief, "An Account of the Nankai Refugee Camp Relief Work," *North China Star*, 26 April 1921.

relief there,[41] while systematic food distributions at the camp were undertaken by a variety of groups and individuals, official and private. Possibly the first of these was a relief committee composed of city merchant-gentry, prominently promoted by Yang Jinglin, a police official recently appointed to run the presidential bodyguard. The group dispensed food once every five days starting in the fall using subscriptions from individuals and firms totalling $40,000.[42] In November, a relief society formed by the municipal police was reportedly giving out *mantou* daily in two sections of the camp (the group continued with clothing and grain distributions through December) while a Hebei charity society (*yizhen hui*) led by one Wan Chuming distributed relief rations in another two sections.[43] Two soup kitchens were established jointly by Tianjin's international society and the city's Port Relief Affairs Office, the Bank of Zhili organized sorghum flour hand outs of 10 *jin* and 7.5 *jin* to "destitute (*jipin*)" and "secondary poor (*cipin*)" families, respectively, and the police chief of a certain district in distant Shanghai arrived with $30,000 for distribution as cash.[44] In all, over sixty charities, firms, schools, and individuals were thanked in one summary report for supplying coal, building materials, straw mattresses, blankets, pipes for running water, medicine, salt packets, and other relief materials over the year.

Despite having 50,000 people crowded on a mere 3/16th of a square mile of land so close to north China's largest treaty port, authorities managed to prevent a major outbreak of disease. The Provincial Government Plague Prevention Agency vaccinated 14,683 camp residents from small pox, and while some 700 camp residents, mostly children, were moved to an isolation ward due to minor small pox outbreaks, there were no known cases of typhus in the camp over the

[41] *Da gongbao*, 1 Nov. 1920.
[42] Xu, *Minguo renwu*, 2126.
[43] *Da gongbao*, 19 Nov. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 15 Nov. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 23 Dec. 1920.
[44] *Da gongbao*, 24 Nov. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 1 Dec. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 27 Dec. 1920.

year. Perhaps more surprisingly, after a handful of students at a nearby school in the district died of typhoid fever early in the fall, the camp was allowed to swell with refugees still, and local schools established ties with the camp, including a Nankai middle school that, starting in December, organized day classes for two groups of 50 refugee children there and a student from newly-opened Nankai University nearby, who organized classes for 88 refugee children the same week.[45]

Back to the fields

Texts on famine administration going back to the Ming period mention a system of "return allocations (*zisong*)" to get vagrant farmers to return to their home districts in times of crisis, a first step in rebuilding agricultural production and a return to some level of normalcy. Rather than receiving a lump of cash at once, this system, at the height of Qing state relief in the mid-1700s, had required that returning farmers follow an itinerary along which they would present a certificate entitling them to cash hand-outs at relief stations at various points on their way home.[46] In 1920, a similar system of luring farmers back to their fields appeared to be coordinated by provincial police, native charities, and the international relief societies. On February 17, 1921, Tianjin police announced that the camp at Nankai would be disbanded within five days, and that all residents would receive 15 days' worth of food and $1 per adult (fifty cents per child), although it is unclear in what fashion these monies were distributed. Refugees heading south or west into the respective relief districts of the international relief committees were required to walk three miles west of the city to retrieve relief tickets (for redemption by the

[45] *Da gongbao*, 6 Dec. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 9 Dec. 1920.
[46] Will, *Bureaucracy and Famine*, 229.

committees upon arrival in their home districts) and were then escorted by police another 10 miles beyond city limits.[47]

The closing of north China's largest encampment appeared coordinated with the return of refugees to their home districts all over the North. At the end of February, the Ministry of Communications instructed the Tianjin-Pukou rail line to add trains for the return of refugees to the counties south of the city and further on into Shandong.[48] That same week Interior Minister Zhang Boyuan instructed Wang Huaiqing to assign soldiers from the capital gendarmerie to begin escorting, from the 28th of February, refugees assembled in the metropolitan region down the Beijing-Suiyuan rail line to the rail hub at Fengtai, and from there to their homes; authorities handling the project were instructed to provide each refugee, irrespective of sex and age, with $10 in relief monies (a rather large sum, and it is unclear if the amount was met in full).[49] On the designated starting day of departure, the 28th, General Wang travelled to the rail station at Fengtai to see off a group of 838 refugees, "men and women, old and young," that his gendarmes had escorted there, posing with them for a photograph to "mark the occasion."[50]

Ten days later, papers reported that refugees camped outside the gates of Beijing were ordered to return to their homes in light of warming weather while refugee shelters throughout the capital were also being cleared.[51] In Baoding, central Zhili, Xiong Xiling's Beiwusheng relief society sent out 94 men and women from its shelter in the city on March 2,[52] while various Beijing charities were reportedly raising money for the purpose of helping to cover the expense of conveying refugees back to their farms.[53] On the 11th of March, two staffers from an

[47] *North China Star*, 26 April 1921.
[48] *Zhongguo minbao*, 28 Feb. 1921.
[49] *Aiguo baihua bao*, 18 Feb. 1921. *Shihua*, 18 Feb. 1921. *Yishi bao*, 19 Feb. 1921.
[50] *Shihua*, 2 March 1921.
[51] *Xiao minbao*, 28 Feb. 1921.
[52] *Guobao*, 3 March 1921.
[53] *Chenbao*, 15 Feb. 1921.

unspecified charity (*cishan hui*) fetched 532 men and women from Zhangjiakou for their return back to Tang County, Zhili,[54] and such group escorts, in batches of 500-1,000, occurred down the rail lines, roads, and canals from Beijing and Zhangjiakou over the course of late winter.[55] The sheer numbers of refugees en route in March overwhelmed authorities, and in one mid-month report officials of the Beijing-Suiyuan, reportedly flooded with refugees, pled with central authorities to stem the flow.[56]

To the Amur

Some ten percent of residents at the Nankai refugee camp had opted to resettle in Heilongjiang rather than return to their home districts at the time of the camp's disbandment in late February, and were each given $1.20 – sixty cents to children – and removed to a temporary encampment northeast of Tianjin for transport north in milder weather.[57] Faced with the task of handling famine-stricken communities in two dozen counties that had largely exhausted their resources, sold off their livestock, and pawned their furniture and kitchen wares for as low as 40 coppers a *jin*, the gentry-run Shandong Relief Committee received word in January 1921 from the Interior Ministry of a state-sponsored emigration program to Heilongjiang.[58] The plan, hatched in December in negotiations between the Cao brothers in Zhili, Sun Liechen in Heilongjiang, and the military leadership in Shandong, along with the Zhili chamber of

[54] *Aiguo baihua bao*, 13 March 1921.
[55] *Chenbao*, 15 March 1921. *Chenbao*, 16 March 1921.
[56] The direction of refugee movement was not only southward, however: media reported that in mid-April, Wang Huaiqing's gendarmes sent off a batch of 545 refugees from Zhili and Shanxi to Hohhot, Datong, Kalgan and elsewhere for settlement in the area of the Great Wall. *Zhongguo minbao*, 11 March 1921. *Guobao*, 17 April 1921.
[57] One report put this initial group at 1,000 families, totaling 4,000 people, of which each adult was given a set of clothes, $1.20, and a few days' worth of food by the authorities. A Chinese Red Cross report from mid-March 1921 gives some indication of where the emigrants to Heilongjiang had been accommodated in Tianjin before their departure: 981 households (totaling 7,000 people) at the Nankai camp itself; 150 families (600 people) at a shelter (*liuyangsuo*) at the residence of a Zhou household; 125 households at a shed facility (*wopu*) associated with Chinese Premier Jin Yunpeng; and 10 households at a shed facility associated with a Li family. *Xin shehui bao*, 1 March 1921. *Chenbao*, 13 March 1921. *North China Star*, 26 April 1921.
[58] *Shihua*, 9 Jan. 1921.

commerce, called for the recruitment and transport of 150,000-200,000 Shandong and Zhili refugees to Harbin and, eventually, to points further north in the area of the Amur River, on the Russian border.[59] While the task of securing financing for the project was to be shared by the various administrations involved, Sun had reportedly raised a substantial sum (*jukuan*) of financing for the project by February – presumably from railroad and landholding interests in his province – sending agents to locations throughout Zhili to set up emigrant recruitment bureaus, and cabling the central government in Beijing for a waiver of transport charges for refugees and managers of the settlement scheme, a request granted the same week.[60] On Sun's behalf, a former head of forestry in Heilongjiang, Zhu Peilan, coordinated the operation in Zhili, working with governor Cao Rui and the municipal police at the main port and rail hub of Tianjin.[61] Already by mid-February, Sun had cabled his superior, Zhang Zuolin, to report that a first (*qianci*) batch of 120,000 Zhili and Shandong refugees had been escorted to parts of Heilongjiang by provincial agents and local officials: 60,000 in areas along the northern line of the China Eastern Railway, 40,000 along its eastern line, and the rest awaiting settlement.[62]

This and other Republican-era state-sponsored colonization schemes heralded a new era of settlement in China's Northeast, replacing the "Shandong-style" of emigration that had existed for centuries, which had taken the form of reversible or seasonal settlement limited to the southern sections of Manchuria. Through railway expansion in the early years of the Republic, colonization of the furthest reaches of Chinese territory as far as the edge of Siberia began in earnest, similar to the more systematic stage of frontier settlement in the American West that had begun with post-Civil War industrial expansion, one that was driven less by independent pioneer

[59] *Yuandong bao*, 17 Dec. 1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 22 Dec. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 28 Dec. 1920.
[60] *Zhongguo minbao*, 25 Jan. 1921. *Zhongguo minbao*, 31 Jan. 1921.
[61] *Yuandong bao*, 22 Jan. 1921. *Zhongguo minbao*, 24 Feb. 1921.
[62] *Yuandong bao*, 16 Feb. 1921.

spirit than capital investment and the recruitment of laborers and settler-families, often on terms favorable to railroad interests.[63]

The Beijing and Tianjin press was employed in the recruitment effort, most notably the major Tianjin daily owned by Cao Kun's Beiyang government, *Da gongbao*, which ran a lengthy article at the end of January exhorting refugees to take the three-day rail journey to Heilongjiang where, they were assured, a home of their own and other comforts awaited them.[64] A man who had been active in generating relief at the Nankai refugee camp, former Zhili provincial police chief Yang Jinglin, penned a series of open letters to the legions of distressed farmers holed up in the capital region in early February, which, serialized in the tabloid-sized dailies *Beijing baihua bao* and *Aiguo baihua bao*, resembled a rousing colloquial speech about the rewards of transplanting their lives to the Northeast.[65] Yang, a Tianjin native with ancestral roots in Shandong, explained that the 1921 colonization program for Shandong and Zhili refugees was the initiative of Cang County native Zhu Aiting, chief of the administration department of the government, or *zhengwu ting*. Only married men with children were eligible to participate, presumably to lower the chances of early defection from the program. Food would be provided for the three-day train journey to Heilongjiang, prospective participants were told, and Yang stressed the comforts of the train journey itself, which stood in contrast to the open boxcars in which refugees had been conveyed, it appears, over government railways up to this point in the

[63] Elwyn Robinson, *History of North Dakota* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 195-6, 217-47.
[64] *Da gongbao*, 31 Jan. 1921.
[65] Fear of the Siberian cold was dispelled with the reasoning that comfort anywhere was a function of money, a problem Manchuria's bounty would solve; fear of the great distance involved was dismissed by pointing out that the three-day train trip to Heilongjiang was in fact half the time it would take most refugees to trudge the 300-400 *li* back to their home districts from Tianjin; then, the traditional reluctance to leave one's native-place for the fringe regions of the country was dismissed as a reason for China's poverty: "Man moves and he thrives, trees move and they die (*ren nuo huo, shu nuo si*)," Yang explained. In other words, clinging to one's roots stifles chances of success. It should be mentioned, meanwhile, that some Beijing papers reported with skepticism on the project, such as the *Shihua* news daily, which, despite being otherwise sober in its regular coverage of relief projects by Beiyang authorities, warned in January of "official malfeasance (*wubi*)" in its management and "mistreatment (*kechi*)" of its desperate participants, yet without lying any specific charges. *Aiguo baihua bao*, 2 Feb. 1921. *Aiguo baihua bao*, 3 Feb. 1921. *Aiguo baihua bao*, 4 Feb. 1921. *Shihua*, 24 Jan. 1921.

crisis (in much the same way that soldiers would be transported exposed to the elements in the coming interprovincial wars of the 1920s).[66] Upon arrival in a designated district of Heilongjiang, the migrants would find housing, food, furniture, livestock, seeds, and farming tools, all "ready-made" for their use by large grain firms. (Whether these were outright grants or whether interest would be charged for such advances was left unsaid). In return, each 100 *mu* of land cleared for cultivation (*kaiken*) by the settler would be split 50-50 with the firm that had sponsored his arrival.

Yang's language left it ambiguous whether the settler would receive title to his share of land, or whether he would give up half the harvest as a form of rent. It may well have been the former. Settlers in Heilongjiang, particularly the frontier region along the Amur river by Russia, were given "the most favorable terms of all" in the Northeast, historian Owen Lattimore later observed. The terms for a "typical refugee colonist," Lattimore wrote after two years of travel in the region in 1929-30, were "arrived at by cooperation between the provincial authorities and the landowners – it being understood that the greatest land holders are likely to be officials themselves, or related by blood or marriage to officials." Landowners or their agents arrived to survey the newly-opened land by the second year's plowing, Lattimore recounted, offering, in his cases, a more favorable partition of six parts to the farmer (who paid nothing for the land), and four parts to the original owner (who paid nothing for the labor used to clear his remaining portion, which might be worth several times more than the original property). These new "peasant-proprietors" were not subject to any land tax for the first six years, during which they repaid, presumably at interest, the capital advanced them in the form of farming equipment and

[66] Per instructions from Ye Gongchuo, minister of communications, the open boxcars carrying refugees over the state railways were changed for covered ones "without exception" in February after press reports of refugees freezing in trains and station managers were instructed to take precautions against losing refugees to exposure in transit and "be humanitarian (*yi zhong rendao*)" in their operations amidst the publicity campaign to draw refugees into the colonization program. *Qunbao*, 4 Feb. 1920. Waldron, *War to Nationalism*, 99.

construction materials. To what extent participants in these schemes fell into debt or failed to acclimate to their new environment varied. Despite common requirements that participants in such schemes be limited to married – and thus more rooted – men with children, defections could reach 40 percent in the first year or two. Terms were less in the migrant's favor the closer he settled to the more developed regions of south Manchuria, the original frontier of the Northeast, which had by the 1920s taken on much of the socio-economic dynamic prevailing in the migrants' home provinces to the south. In 1929-30 Liaoning, for example, settlers paid anywhere from 40 to 60 percent of their crop as rent, and were much less likely to ever own their own land, while land taxes were also heavier.[67]

In mid-April 1921, however, a reconfiguration of key positions in national and provincial governments occurred at a seven-week long conference of warlords and political figures held in Tianjin, a summit that preoccupied north China's main powerbrokers just as the famine peaked nearby in the last few weeks before the spring harvest. Little was accomplished at the negotiating table, aside from a declaration objecting to Sun Yat'sen's claims to the presidency from his power base in Guangzhou, and the sidelining of the so-called Communications clique, headed by Liang Shiyi, by a cabinet reshuffling in which Ye Gongchuo, who had capably presided over the crucial infrastructure of the ministry of communications through the famine, was replaced by the interior minister, Zhang Zhitan. Cao Kun solidified his control and appointments to the leadership of Shaanxi and Gansu, while Zhang Zuolin formally spread his influence into Chahar, Jehol, and Suiyuan, the three special regions in Inner Mongolia. The stage was set for the

[67] Owen Lattimore, *Manchuria: Cradle of Conflict* (New York: Macmillan, 1935), 209-221. *Beijing baihua bao*, 3 Feb. 1921.

showdown between Cao and Zhang in the bloody years ahead, ushering in the incessant warring of the warlord period.[68]

But the conference also resulted in a change in the leadership of Heilongjiang. With Jilin governor Bao Guiqing retiring ill to Tianjin in March 1921, Sun Liechen left his post to take his place.[69] The new dual military and civilian governor of Heilongjiang, Wu Chunsheng, was reportedly, and inexplicably, against continuing the colonization program.[70] Authorities in Tianjin were cabled to prevent refugees from moving ahead to the province, leaving them languishing in the environs of the city.[71] Official sponsorship of refugee movement to the Northeast had apparently ceased. But this did not stem the flow of refugees on foot there and elsewhere. Families fleeing the famine districts "were at their peak in May 1921," an American recalled from his childhood, when they marched by his missionary home just across the Zhili border in Fengtian. Ultimately, the population of his town "increased considerably with the many who stayed on, building their little shacks on the outskirts or living in deserted temples."[72] As was so often the case, official control over the movement of people was far from complete and many thousands more moved into the Northeast and beyond.

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[68] On the conference agenda was the allocation of $500,000 or $3,000,000, depending on the source, to Zhang from the central treasury for an expedition aimed at retaking Urga (or Ulan Bator, the Outer Mongolian capital) from the White Russian and Buddhist mystic baron Nikolaus von Ungern-Sternberg, who, having taken the city in February and launched a reign of terror there "to exterminate commissars, communists and Jews with their families," was intent on forming a Buddhist empire encompassing Mongolia and Tibet. But Zhang was beaten to it. In June, Ungern-Sternberg's forces were destroyed instead by Red Army forces teamed up with local Mongolian fighters. It his curious that Zhang, a vehement anti-communist, shared a military target with the Soviet army. As Gavan McCormack pointed out, the campaign would have given Zhang an appealing role as "liberator" deep inside Mongolian territory. McCormack, *Chang Tso-lin*, 53-55.
[69] *Ibid.*, 42.
[70] A career Fengtian military man with family origins in Shandong, Wu would later die from wounds inflicted by the same Japanese bomb that killed Zhang Zuolin in their train car outside Mukden in 1928. Xu, *Minguo renwu*, 617.
[71] *Chenbao*, 11 April 1921. *Chenbao*, 21 April 1921.
[72] Tharp, *White Chinese,* 108-9.

Under the White Cross

In late winter and early spring, refugees were returning to the fields of north China just as the joint Chinese-foreign "international" relief committees were intensifying their relief operations in the interior. A journal taken by an American field worker for the Tianjin-based international relief society gives us a window into one such operation in a corner of the east-central Zhili famine field. In February 1921, Harley Farnsworth MacNair, who would turn 30 that year, was posted 110 miles south of Beijing at the small market town of Shaheqiao (Sand River Bridge), a cluster of mud homes with a "picturesque bridge uniting the two tiny sides of the town." Shaheqiao lay in Hejian County near the junction of the Xiahe and Putaohe, two rivers coursing over the north China plain to Tianjin: "Flat and dusty, dusty, dusty, endlessly dusty," MacNair noted. "Not one green thing."[73] Standing on a dyke, the American could see fourteen villages from his headquarters, each of them set on "slight rises" with a ring of willow trees and the occasional peach and jujube orchard.[74] The county had been hit hard by the drought, with 60-90 percent of its population rendered destitute by the famine, in one estimate, and 90-100 percent destitute in adjacent Xian County. Still, barking dogs, crowing roosters and other signs of life met the stranger at each cluster of homes, and the village market at Shaheqiao operated throughout the winter, offering "boiled sweet potatoes; coarse homespun white cloth; cabbages," MacNair noted. "No grain, of course."[75]

Shaheqiao lay in the mission district of the Anglican Diocese of Beijing, and while Anglican ministers had "conducted much industrial and other relief work" there over the famine

[73] Harley Farnsworth MacNair, *With the White Cross in China: the Journal of a Famine Relief Worker with a Preliminary Essay by Way of Introduction* (Peking: Henri Vetch, 1939), 50.
[74] *Ibid*., 73, 101, 115.
[75] *Ibid*., 60, 68.

year, the "main work was done on behalf" of the North China International Famine Relief Society of Tientsin (Tianjin) "with some extra help" from Liang Shiyi's North China Relief Society. Back in November, the Tianjin society had published one of the earliest pieces of intelligence on the extent of crop failure and destitution across the entire famine zone. Headed by former Chinese foreign minister M. T. Liang as president and the American consul in Tianjin, Stuart J. Fuller, as vice president, the society had assumed responsibility for relieving the eastern half of Zhili, an area of plains served by the rail line running south from Tianjin to Pukou on the Yangzi. Based on "Local Information" forms the committee received back from Christian missions it had contacted in all five provinces, the society estimated that in November 14,248,000 people were already "threatened by famine," over half of whom resided in Zhili. Over the course of mid and late autumn, the society launched relief operations in 26 Zhili (and a few Shandong) counties, working with missionaries and local gentry to relieve 130,000 people using $400,000. By January 1, 1921, the society had mobilized $522,662 for its relief operations in east Zhili - or 16 percent of the $3,232,069 the group would spend by the end of the crisis in May.[76] This pattern held true for all six of the main joint foreign-Chinese relief organs, each of which spent roughly nine-tenths of its total relief monies for 1920-21 in the second, and more intense, half of the food crisis. The total numbers of those relieved by the international societies across the famine field rose in a corresponding fashion from 461,000 in December, 1920, to 3,259,627 the following March and 7,731,611 at the end of May.[77]

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[76] Fuller and Liang, eds., "Statement of Aims," 6-16.

[77] By their own count, the international committees had mobilized the following amounts by New Year's 1921: $581,832 by the Beijing committee (or eleven percent of its total of $5,420,787 for 1920-21); $331,029 by the Henan committee (nine percent of its $3,662,145 total); $80,081 by the Shandong committee (four percent of its $1,837,260); $158,632 by the Shanxi committee (ten percent of its $1,465,562); and $122,000 by the Shaanxi committee (eleven percent of its $1,059,500). The American Red Cross was an exception to this, mobilizing $1,000,000 by January 1, 1921, over 40 percent of its total of $2,428,000 for 1920-21. All amounts are in Mexican silver dollars, a major currency still in use in the early Republic. Edwards, ed., *North China Famine*, 18, 20.

Arriving by cart on February 14, travelling west from the railhead in Cang County, MacNair relieved the two foreign men who had opened the station earlier in the year, and he would stay in town for six weeks, working over the Chinese New Year. Altogether twenty foreigners were posted at the relief station, seven of whom were members of the faculty at St. John's University in Nanjing, the American (Episcopal) Church Mission school where Chinese Foreign Minister Yan Huiqing had once taught English literature. Each served five week-postings at the station from early January to mid-May, when the station was shut down.[78] Ever since foreign relief workers began making forays into the stricken interior under the adopted flag of the 1920 international relief effort – a white cross on a blue background flying from grain carts, junks and at grain depots across the five-province famine field – Zhili authorities periodically issued orders to local militias and police to provide armed escorts, particularly in drought areas with bandit activity or stray bands of marauding soldiers, such as southeast Zhili and north Henan.[79]

Working out of what had once been a coal merchant's family compound in the village center, MacNair and his team of native clerks and laborers were provisioned with sorghum brought in daily, often through violent dust storms, on eight or so carts from the rail head in Cang County to the east. Much of the work involved comparing arriving loads with relief logs; carters were charged double the market rate for either losses or gains incurred on their freight en route – any gain suggesting grain had been carelessly weighed down with water or sand after some grain was pinched.[80] Chinese clerks first canvassed the district, splitting households into three tiers of need, and each family would send a representative, led by a village headman holding a village flag, three times a month to collect ten days' rations at the relief station. On one

[78] MacNair, *White Cross*, 37, 42.
[79] *Da gongbao*, 3 Nov. 1920. *Da gongbao*, 28 Nov. 1920.
[80] MacNair, *White Cross*, 54, 56.

day in February, 15,589 *jin* was distributed to 700 families, or just over a half-*jin* per day for each member of a family of four. With the exception of young women, every demographic from children to the aged appeared for collection at the relief station, which was guarded and kept in order by soldiers armed with bayonets. MacNair also had a "limited supply" of padded coats, which he gave out regularly to the "most ragged" appearing at the depot.[81]

Station operating expenses came to $200 every two weeks, which included a daily "board allowance" of a silver dollar for each foreign supervisor plus the pay for the "clerks, cooks and coolies," some of whom were local Chinese back from serving in the Labor Corps in France during the war. (MacNair spotted pictures of the French city of Lyons tacked to the walls of two remote village homes.)[82] A colleague determined that for every dollar of relief spent on the station, 86 cents went to food, 8 cents went to transportation, and 6 cents went to general expenses.[83] In spite of the gravity of the operation, the workers unloading the arriving grain sacks were "an extraordinarily jolly, willing bunch. Always joking and laughing," the American observed. "If the carts from Tsangchow are delayed," in the event of a sandstorm or other incident pushing the workers' shift past dusk, "they don't protest but treat [unloading each 1.2 ton-cartload in the dark] as a game."[84]

As station supervisor, MacNair chased down reports of fraud in the surrounding district. He recorded that in one case a letter sent to the station charged that, in a village 18 *li* away, a wealthy family was partaking of relief grain and a second non-existent family was also on the rolls, to the benefit of the village chief. Upon investigation, MacNair found the "allegation apparently unbased on fact; the 'rich' family had every appearance of being extremely poor, in

[81] *Ibid*., 45-48.
[82] *Ibid*., 46, 56, 61.
[83] *Ibid*., 93.
[84] *Ibid*., 69.

spite of not knowing ahead of time of our coming." The fictional family "consist[ed] of one vociferous and voluble woman ... who lives with her one son and two nephews," he determined. "They offered every evidence of being real - and of needing food."[85] If malfeasance was present in the famine field, so, apparently, were old gripes and grievances lying, presumably, behind such false accusations.

MacNair also developed an admiration for the people in his famine district, "almost all" of whom were "most remarkably cheerful – in appearance," he noted. Despite their "jabbering and crowding" as they filed into the depot's courtyard, and despite telltale signs of malnutrition, stunted growth and in some cases insanity induced by the horrors of famine, "most of the people around here are *very* bright and intelligent-looking, their faces showing real character. Some are distinguished in appearance with beautiful hands and eyes."[86] After several weeks touring his district – during which he went on what he called art-buying "orgies" from rich families selling off paintings and vases – MacNair noted that "the inhabitants of this black famine-stricken area are, for the most part, smiling and cheerful in their attitude. A lot more will die, as many have died already, but, if they must, they will die smiling..."[87] Such stoicism appears to have been interpreted by some foreign observers as an unusually high Chinese tolerance for suffering, one that, it was thought, contributed to general humanitarian inaction by the Chinese during calamity. This is a matter that will be taken up in the next chapter, but for now we might note a similar tone of admiration expressed at the time by a relief observer in northwest Zhili. "There was a courtesy, tact, gentleness, and for the most part an honesty, which surprised me," Mansfield Freeman wrote in a May 1921 issue of *Millard's*, an American news magazine published in Shanghai. Writing from Tang County – where, with a population half-stricken by drought, local

[85] *Ibid*., 90-91.
[86] *Ibid*., 48, 57, 62. Italics in the original.
[87] *Ibid*. 86.

gentry had been setting up one soup kitchen for every two villages in the county in December, as we saw in chapter two, a county effort complemented by relief from the Buddhist Relief Society – Freeman added that "Village chiefs in some remote spot in the mountains received us with the grace and naturalness of cultured gentlemen. Even the children knew how to meet strangers and there was a spontaneity about their courtesy the secret of which many American children have not learned."[88]

The first rain of the season fell on the afternoon of February 28, MacNair noted from his corner of east-central Zhili, "not a heavy one, but enough to encourage the crops and lay the dust momentarily."[89] The 28th, fortuitously, was the very same day the Interior Ministry had set for the return of refugees to their home districts, and the fresh rain no doubt brightened the homeward journey of many thousands of returning farm hands. "The people are beginning to work in the fields now," MacNair noted on March 5.[90] "Left Shanghai one month ago tonight," he wrote nine days later. "A month of good experience. Not as harrowing as I had feared – mainly on account of the stoical, and even smiling, sportsmanship of these remarkable people."[91]

Many, though, had not gotten onto the rolls of MacNair's relief operation, including those returning from places like Nankai and Zhangjiakou after the canvassing of area needs had already taken place. Such exclusions occurred all over the famine field due to the stretched resources of the international societies, as the Peking committee noted regarding its work in south Zhili's Daming County where, among a population of half a million, the society "decided to omit certain villages completely and the villages to be helped were selected from the government lists [of needy districts

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[88] Mansfield Freeman, "Observations on Famine Relief Work," *Millard's*, 21 May 1921.
[89] MacNair, *White Cross*, 68.
[90] *Ibid*., 85.
[91] The same week reports were arriving in Beijing of healthy rainfall in stricken western Shandong, as well, promising a "bumper harvest (*fengshou*)" of spring wheat. MacNair, *White Cross*, 97. *Aiguo baihua bao*, 17 March 1921.

and households] by lot…"[92] In Hejian, MacNair found such families in their homes mashing millet-chaff, bark and leaves into six-inch cakes, which many ate twice a day at mid-morning and mid-afternoon. Some residents were insistent in getting onto the lists. "Another onslaught of the 'monstrous regiment of women,'" the American recorded one Saturday in mid-March. Most of the women had come from a dozen or so miles away, despite having tightly bound feet, making, in groups of ten to twenty, "as confused and menacing an uproar as a Shakespearian Roman mob" to get their families onto the rolls.[93] While some succeeded, others presumably succumbed to hunger and disease, if they did not fall into the care of the various native relief programs we have seen in previous chapters. Still others found their way into the hands of the Christian missions, which, in addition to facilitating the operations of the relief committees, carried out their own relief programs over the year.

The missions

At a conference of world Protestant missions in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1910, an effort was launched to coordinate the independent activity of the many dozen Protestant denominations across China, surveying each province and dividing it into discrete mission fields. The effort resulted in a detailed tally of missionary numbers and their Chinese constituents across what would become, in a little over a year, the Chinese Republic. At the time of our famine, foreign missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant, were spread thin beyond the major coastal cities, in the case of Zhili comprising 848 men and women leading a church enrollment of 600,856 (or two percent of a 1920 provincial population of 27 million) the vast majority of which were

[92] Edwards, ed., *North China Famine*, 128.
[93] *Ibid.*, 57, 106-9.

Catholic.[94] Put another way, there were 31 foreign missionaries per million residents of Zhili, and 74 Chinese mission workers. But even these figures are deceivingly high, since both Catholic and Protestant church activity was weighted towards Zhili's northern half around Beijing and Tianjin. Further to the south, the flat Yellow River basin drought zone in 1920-21 had one of sparsest presences of evangelistic centers in all of North, Central or South China.[95]

In September 1920, mission representatives first convened in Beijing to orchestrate relief measures by the Christian communities spread across the stricken provinces, and their investigations on the extent of crop failure and human need in remote parts of the country began appearing in both the Chinese and foreign-language press.[96] While mission workers were instrumental in the relief forays into the interior by the international societies, acting as point-men and facilitators and often handling the distributions themselves, this came at a cost. "Entrusting relief to missionaries" created "immense difficulties," the secretary to an international society explained in October 1920. "Many [non-Christians] are known to be holding back large sums, and others sending them to other organizations."[97] While spending over $2,000,000 between them by the end of the crisis feeding local communities and housing orphans and refugees, European and American mission leaders, both Catholic and Protestant, were also careful to include local elites in their aid activities to limit disputes over the fairness of its distribution.[98] "We insist that the gentry shall be asked to control these distributions," one Father T. Corset explained in early September from Yanshan County on Zhili's coastline to his

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[94] Present in the 1920-21 famine zones of south-central Zhili were the China Inland Mission and London Missionary Society, among other Protestant groups, and French Jesuit and Lazarist missions; in north Henan, the Canadian Presbyterian field overlapped with the Foreign Mission of Milan, Italy; and in northwest Shandong, the United Methodists (United Kingdom) and American (Protestant) Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions overlapped with the mission field of French Franciscans. Stauffer, ed., *Christian* Occupation, 1.
[95] *Ibid*., 299-300.
[96] *Zhongguo minbao*, 19 Sept. 1920. *Shihua*, 21 Sept. 1920. *Jingbao*, 23 Sept. 1920.
[97] *Celestial Empire*, 30 Oct. 1920.
[98] The source gives an "incomplete" figure of $2,021,178.90, adding that some missions did not respond to requests for their accounts. Edwards, ed., *North China Famine*, 25.

superior, the bishop of Beijing, "so that they may be witness to the equitable and impartial distribution as we intend to make of it."[99]

Based in Daming, south Zhili, the very heart of the drought zone, Bishop Henry Lécroart, S.J., cited jealously and quarrels among the natives for his reluctance to take on food distribution in his 39-county ecclesiastic jurisdiction of 11 million inhabitants. "It must be kept in mind that the missionaries of the interior, as a matter of fact and experiences in Southeast Chihli, cannot without immense difficulties, distribute millet soup to the needy," he explained to the readership of Celestial Empire in the October 1920. "The ideal way of helping the starving population would be for the Government itself to furnish the markets of the interior with foodstuffs."[100] (Bishop Lécroart's reluctance gave way by the middle of November when he took over a $10,000 North China (Tientsin) International Society relief operation in south Zhili's Guangping, Feixiang and Yongnian counties, and another $4,257 project in Jiaohe County further north, in both cases working "in consultation with local officials and gentry."[101])

Opportunities for evangelism of course accompanied the food crisis, a strategy that certain missions did not shy away from, doubtless fueling suspicions among non-Christians. "We did not lose sight of the special opportunity afforded us through this work to preach the gospel," in the words of one Lutheran mission worker in western Henan. "The Lutherans of America donated large sums," Augustana Synod (Swedish Mission in China) missionary Alfred E. Trued recorded in his memoirs, and "They wanted the need on the Lutheran mission fields to be met first if possible." Ration "tickets were in reality tracts of a special kind," he explained, "so the ones who received them got both spiritual and physical food. In that way the gospel was also

[99] *Celestial Empire*, 16 Oct. 1920.
[100] *Celestial Empire*, 30 Oct. 1920.
[101] Fuller and Liang, eds., "Statement of Aims," 15-16.

spread."[102] While the North China (Tientsin) International Society, chaired by United Methodist pastor Frank B. Turner, had emphatically related in all-caps in its November report that "NO RELIGIOUS DISTINCTION WHATEVER" was being made in its relief operations, "ABSOLUTE NEED BEING THE ONLY CRITERION," religious motivations apparently continued to play a role in his denomination's independent relief projects: "Mrs. G. Purves Smith at Chu Chia addressing a crowd of famine folk waiting for grain," read a photo caption appearing after the famine in *The Missionary Echo of the United Methodist Church*. "'That day we gave away over 400 tracts.'"[103]

Amid such evangelical campaigns, distrust or outright animosity surfaced occasionally between the various Christian constituencies in the field. "Romanists" and Protestants were "at first shy of working together" on relief projects in Tangshan County east of Tianjin, according to a British pastor in the United Methodist Church, where Lazaristes were in operation.[104] Earlier in the year, Commissioner Francis Pearce of the Salvation Army had sent a letter of protest to the British consul in Tianjin over "certain vicious people said to be Catholics" who had crashed an "open-air meeting" in the region and "our people" were "set upon by several men with sticks." (The YMCA and other Christian missions had agreed to preach indoors, the commissioner of police explained to the consul in a follow-up letter, and the Salvation Army should follow suit.)[105] And missionary groups were not immune to scandal in the treaty-port press, including

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[102] Augustana Synod Missionaries, *Our Second Decade in China, 1915-1925: Sketches and Reminiscences by Missionaries of the Augustana Synod Mission in the Province of Honan* (Minneapolis: Board of Foreign Missions, 1925), 109, 112.
[103] *The Missionary Echo of the United Methodist Church*, Volume XX (London: Henry Hooks, 1922), 234.
[104] The writer noted "some little relief" by local officials in Tangshan, while gentry there assisted the United Methodist relief project "in various ways" distribute 850 tons of grain to 500 villages, one member of the gentry lending carts to provision his and surrounding villages. The area of Tangshan, it should be noted, was only lightly affected by the drought. *The Missionary Echo of the United Methodist Church*, Volume XXIX (London: Henry Hooks, 1922), 15.
[105] "Tientsin: 1920: Dossier 11: Missions," Pearce to Ker, letter, 11 Feb. 1920. Commissioner of Police to Ker, despatch, 3 Mar. 1920, FO 674/229.

the same periodicals through which missionaries of all stripes kept in touch with their counterparts in the coastal enclaves. One such publication was *Celestial Empire*, a newsweekly published in Shanghai since 1874 and still in 1920 boasting "a large outport circulation, especially amongst Missionaries in the interior," its fifty-plus pages including regular mission dispatches on conditions and events in all provinces of the country. The Salvation Army, having run its own soup kitchen in Beijing and other minor relief operations over the year, was later involved in a minor scandal over the purchase of refugee children. "General Booth has announced that he has bought a hundred girls in China, presumably in the northern famine districts, at a cost of thirty shillings each," *Celestial Empire* editorialized in early 1922, referring presumably to Bramwell Booth, son of Salvation Army founder William Booth. It was stated in Booth's telegram to the media that the "girls are to be trained in Salvationist work," the paper added, "so that they are evidently to be made of use to forward the aims of the General in China…it is hoped that the British authorities will make a full investigation."[106]

Seeing and not seeing

In their dual role as correspondents and facilitators for high-profile urban-based relief programs and as field representatives communicating with a global network of church organizations, missionaries also enjoyed a public exposure considerably out of proportion to their actual numbers on Chinese ground. The fact that, particularly since the intensification of Protestant efforts in the nineteenth century, missions in China were scattered down the cart paths and waterways that snaked inland from the treaty ports for the purpose of outreach to the country's common folk meant that mission compounds also served as relays for fellow nationals on holiday or business seeking familiar comforts, companionship and, naturally, perspectives on

[106] *Celestial Empire*, 4 Feb. 1921.

the natives around. In times of crisis, this readily translated into central roles for missionaries in the narratives offered afterwards by published travelogues and news copy, accounts of the famine that readily made it into later scholarly treatments of the event.

"The French missionaries of Tchili must be given the first place among those who gave the alarm of the famine," Abel Bonnard informed his readership of armchair travelers in En Chine, 1920-1921. The Frenchman had just been given a tour of mission grounds in severely afflicted Xian County by Bishop Lécroart, remarking that "Everything from his natural laziness to the profundity of his thoughts counsels the Chinaman to take no action."[107] "If it were not for the missionaries there would be mighty little famine relief available for the interior multitudes of China to-day," Eleanor Franklin Egan echoed to readers of *The Saturday Evening Post* in April 1921. "The mission stations, schools and colleges are supplying practically the entire working force in the outfields [sic] famine relief," the American wrote, an otherwise capable journalist who had spent the better part of the previous 17 years in the Far East.[108] Nor did Egan's travel companion, Upton Close, note any native relief activity in his published travel book, despite devoting ten pages to their tour together across northwest Shandong and south Zhili. Instead, the American noted only "two courageous missionary women" working out of a Confucian temple under the inscription "the True Culture is Sympathy," words "most appropriate for the (relief) use to which representatives of another faith were putting the sage's sanctuary."[109] Mission compounds in China's interior served as lodging for a touring W. Somerset Maugham in 1920-21, too, as we will see in the next chapter, which made sense considering the availability of guidebooks to the national network of mission compounds, one of which was freshly published

[107] Abel Bonnard, *En Chine, 1920-1921*. Veronica Lucas, trans. (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1926), 127-8.
[108] Egan, "Fighting the Chinese Famine," 48.
[109] Upton Close, *In the Land of the Laughing Buddha: the Adventures of an American Barbarian in China* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1924), 145.

in Shanghai in 1920, complete with suggested inland routes similar to *Rough Guides* or *Lonely Planets*.[110]

Curiously, before making her determinations on the indispensability of the missionary community to rural Chinese, Eleanor Franklin Egan had spent two days in an American Board Mission compound in Dezhou, Shandong, one of the counties where, it might be recalled from chapter one, provincial gentry Lü Jingyu's quasi-governmental aid group had divided up 5,000 tons of relief grain for gentry distribution just a few weeks before. Afterwards, Egan and Upton Close both traveled by cart through south Zhili's Wei County, where, as we saw in chapter two, a handful of local men were credited in the county gazetteer for relieving their neighbors in 1920-21, and where in the village of Zhangjiazhuang, nine-tenths destitute, a village-wide relief program carried its residents through the awful year, after which the villager initiating the program publicly burned all resulting notes of debt incurred as a "demonstration of charity." Like proverbial ships passing in the night, native relief readily passed beneath the noses of foreign observers to the crisis. This should, perhaps, not be surprising, since the well-worn routes trod by foreigners in the vast interior provided only very limited exposure to the native population spread out along webs of paths connecting thousands of communities.

It must be stressed, however, that the parallel channels of relief activity evident so far in this study were less functions of nationality than of social, confessional, professional, or other types of affiliations on which relief networks were built. And this of course applied to all relief actors, native or foreign. In other words, no Chinese was in a position to determine who was

[110] The novelist was hardly enamored of his hosts. "Mrs. Wingrove said the same things about them [the Chinese] that I had already heard so many missionaries say," he noted after an evening in a mission home on a "little hill just outside the gates of a populous city." "They were a lying people, untrustworthy, cruel, and dirty, but a faint light was visible in the East…" Paul Hutchinson, ed. *A Guide to Important Mission Stations in Eastern China (Lying Along the Main Routes of Travel)* (Shanghai: The Mission Book Company, 1920). W. Somerset Maugham. *On a Chinese Screen* (London: William Heinemann, 1922), 37-41.

feeding whom, where, and when, across the five-province famine zone, either. A good illustration of this would be the example of retired statesman Liang Shiyi, arguably the most prominent Chinese involved in relief in our famine. A native of Guangdong, Liang had been active in the Communications and Finance ministries under the late President Yuan Shikai. In 1918, after Yuan's failed monarchal bid, Liang spent time in Japan making "connections with influential financiers and statesmen in that country for the industrial development of China," according to his entry in the *Who's Who in China* of 1920.[111] Serving as director-general of the Domestic Loan Administration at the appearance of famine that year, Liang formed the North China Relief Society, mentioned at several points earlier in this study, an organization that appears to have best straddled the various sectors of society in China responding to the famine. An accounting of $406,600 in grants made by Liang's group in the last four months of 1920 reveals that the money was roughly split in fourths between General Wang Huaiqing's gendarmerie for soup kitchen expenses in the capital ($100,000); various Catholic and Protestant organizations ($92,400); various international and native relief societies in Beijing, Shandong, Henan, and Shaanxi ($86,300); and the North China Relief Society's own investigations and distributions across the famine field ($71,715).[112] Considering this level of coordination and shared resources with agencies official and extragovernmental, native and foreign, across the five-province famine field, it would make sense that Liang's society was considered by the main

[111] Powell and Tong, eds., *Who's Who in* China, 109.
[112] The group's Christian beneficiaries spanned Beijing's Catholic Diocese ($48,000 to take in 3,987 refugee children in 13 Zhili counties at $12 per child) and several Protestant groups, mostly for autumn wheat seed distribution in Zhili counties, including the Church of England Mission, the London Missionary Society, the China Inland Mission, the Baoding and Jinan branches of the YMCA, and an American hospital in Shandong. Miscellaneous grant recipients included the Shanxi provincial government ($20,000 mostly for emergency relief handouts in 10 counties); county governments in four of the five famine provinces ($8,000); and the British-American Tobacco Company ($2,385 for wheat seed distribution in Xingtai and Yongnian counties, Zhili). It is unclear how it was decided which particular groups would be entrusted with the monies. *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 16 Jan. 1921.

international relief group based in Beijing as *the* umbrella organization for the Chinese side.[113] As we have seen, Liang's group even published its own magazine on the relief effort, *Jiuzai zhoukan* (*Famine Relief Weekly*), starting in October 1920. Each issue of 30-odd pages consisted mainly of photographs, investigations of the field, and correspondence with central state organs, missionaries, and county magistrates and county relief societies, and donor lists. Yet, in over 1,000 pages of print over its eleven months of existence, *Jiuzai zhoukan* gives but one mention of the Buddhist Relief Society, which Liang's umbrella group – purportedly inclusive of "all" eighteen of the Chinese societies formed in the Fall[114] – was supposedly overseeing. More, this mention in the magazine was in the form of a March 1921 report by the Buddhist society's *independent* investigations and relief operations in Pingding County, Shanxi. Likewise, gentry Lü Jingyu's Shandong Relief Society, the single biggest relief actor in that province in December, also appears but once in Liang's weekly over the course of the crisis.[115] This suggests that the Chinese relief organ closest to the foreign community – the North China Relief Society – was in fact privy only to certain channels of relief over 1920-21 and was in no position to capture the volume and provenance of relief emanating from China's major cities – let alone overall levels of both incoming and internal relief activity reached in the towns and villages of some three hundred counties spread across the North. So, if statesman Liang Shiyi's cosmopolitan outfit, arguably the best candidate for a clearinghouse of information on relief activity in a fractured Republic 1920-21, could report on only part of what was occurring in the field that

[113] "Chinese societies included in the North China Famine Relief Society," lists the Peking United International Famine Relief Committee report from 1922. "Pei-wu-sheng Society, Mohammedan Society, Peking Christian Society, Chihli Chiu Huang Society, Neng-hsueh Chiu Tsai Society, Chinese Red Cross Society, P'ing T'iao Society, Hua-pei Society, Shansi Han Tsai Society, Shansi Ch'ou Chen Society, Chihli Yi Chen Society, Buddhist Society, Shun-Chih Han Tsai Society, Pei-fang Society." Edwards, ed., *North China Famine*, inside cover.
[114] Two Buddhist Relief Society representatives, Zhang Xiujue and Liu Xuan, had attended the founding meeting of the Peking United International Famine Relief Committee in October 1920; in its report at the end of the crisis, the Peking committee listed a "Buddhist Society" as part of Liang's North China Famine Relief Society. *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 6 March 1921. *Xiao gongbao*, 3 Oct. 1920.
[115] *Jiuzai zhoukan*, 28 Nov. 1920.

year, the question remains how legible native famine relief operations were to the members of the country's foreign community, and for our purposes, to the most influential of these foreign voices compiling the reports used heavily by later generations of historians.

We have already seen how, in chapter three, a major social survey of the Chinese capital completed in 1919 by American sociologist Sidney Gamble of Yenching (Yanjing) University poorly reflected the degree of relief actually generated by military organs, charities, and households in neighborhoods around the capital just nine months later in the fall of 1920. Using student-canvassers from Peking (Union) University, a Protestant school then with 85 students, the author conceded that it had been "impossible to secure any detailed report of the work" of the city's "private charitable associations," but that "*from appearances* they were not very active."[116] Guesswork was similarly employed in the post-famine report of fellow Princeton graduate Dwight W. Edwards who, as secretary to the Peking United International Famine Relief Committee, was charged with the task of summarizing all relief activity in north China over the course of 1920-21. "With the approval of the other societies," the Peking society was, in its own words, "recognized as the head society…acting as a centre of information regarding what was

[116] To give a better sense of the sources informing Gamble's research, in his preface he thanks "Dr. L.K. Tao of the Department of Sociology of the Peking (Government) University for material concerning the background of Chinese philanthropy." In the same year as Gamble's study, the Chinese-run English-language *Peking Leader* newspaper had printed a "Background of China's Philanthropy" in a sold-out magazine supplement in which L.K. Tao (aka Tao Lügong), fresh from earning a degree in sociology at the London School of Economics, explained that the "benevolent families" that could be "easily [found] out… in any given locality" in China simply had no "genuine public spirit or clear comprehension of the poor" in mind; rather they acted to garner a "good reputation" or "more often" their acts were "due to a religious faith that charity would earn for themselves a good return." As we will see in our last chapter, assigning singular motives to the wide array of benevolent acts in traditional China was a practice of Protestant missionary commentators, and one taken up here by a Chinese academic providing background on the subject for Gamble's influential study. It should come as little surprise then that Gamble likened the underlying "motives" of the capital's "private relief" efforts to those of their counterparts in the "western countries in the Middle Ages." The giver's "chief aim" was a "good reputation" or "rewards" in the "future life…the idea of helping the unfortunate being entirely secondary." (The supplement was in turn praised by *The Chinese Press* newspaper for being "a swift survey of contemporary life, particularly that phase of it that has met the contact of Western life." For those living in the "outports," meaning the interior of the country, the review continued, "who only see the dross in that contact, the unhinging of old moralities, without the compensation of the new, this gives a more dignified picture.") Gamble, *Social Survey*, xvii, 134-6, 267, 283. Italics added. "China in 1918–being the Special Anniversary Supplement," *The Peking Leader*, 12 Feb. 1919. Xu, *Minguo renwu*, 1511.

done in all sections of the five provinces." The group's final, end-of-crisis report, published in 1922, would claim to be a "summary of all the multifarious aspects of the work done to help the people afflicted by famine in the provinces of Chihli, Shantung, Honan, Shansi and Shensi," with the object to "place on record, for future guidance, the various organizations by which help was brought to the sufferers." But, Edwards had set this ambitious goal for his project despite the fact that it had been "impossible to procure a statement from the various [native] societies of the amount of relief done by them," as the report noted in its section on "relief done by the distinctly Chinese Societies." "This was asked for, but received little response. The fact was that there were a large number of such societies and that they handled considerable sums of money." Instead, the report overseen by Edwards (one-time general secretary of the YMCA in China who would later compose a monograph on Yenching University for a New York-based Protestant missionary organization) offered a summary table of "the amount of funds from all sources which were available in the past famine. In some cases of course, these are simply estimates and in the instance of the amount contributed by the Chinese societies merely a guess."[117] By their own account, Edwards and his team of compilers were merely poking in the dark when they arrived at a total of $8,000,000 contributed by Chinese relief societies in the 1920-21 famine. To put Edwards' estimate into perspective, it corresponds almost exactly to the value of the 170,457,191 *jin* of grain sponsored by Chinese relief organs – some official, but overwhelmingly extragovernmental – moving on government railways in December alone, just one out of the nine months of famine. (See the Appendix.) Any history that puts the total amount of money spent at $37 million – specifying that 40 percent of this was foreign in origin – is based on the guesswork made by Edwards's staff in Beijing. As we saw in our introduction, this applies to just about

[117] Edwards, ed., *North China Famine*, 25-26. Dwight W. Edwards, *Yenching University* (New York: United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia, 1959).

anything written on the 1920-21 famine, in English or Chinese.

Under the (American) Red Cross

Over the border from Zhili in Shandong, in a section of the north China plain where the Boxer movement had originated just two decades before, the American Red Cross was running relief projects in sections of nineteen counties in 1920-21, but along a different logic than those of most of the missions or the joint Chinese-foreign committees. "The classes *most useful to the province* obviously would be the choice of any sociologist," the group reasoned in an end-of-crisis report. "This meant cutting off our lists the maimed, the halt and the blind, the diseased, paupers, and the aged without support."[118] The directors decided that "Vigorous men of family were to be the natural choice for laborers," and spent a total of $2,428,000 to hire afflicted locals – each allowed five dependents to be fed along with them – for motor-road and well-digging projects in a dozen sections of the famine field, most extensively in Shandong, relieving a total of 928,000 people for at least part of the crisis.[119] The American Red Cross directors saw their project as an intervention in a society where, as they understood it, relief in times of crisis customarily met immediate survival needs, and nothing more, contributing to the larger modernization discourse popular among foreign and Chinese intellectuals seeking to account for the country's impoverishment in the modern era. ("The Chinese believe in direct giving," a *Peking & Tientsin Times* correspondent wrote from Henan in November, "whereas foreigners

[118] Baker, ed., "Report," 14. Italics added.
[119] An estimated 83 percent of American Red Cross expenditure went to relief pay or rations, while the rest was spent on operating expenses, such as staff salaries. Around half of the group's 281 foreign workers in the field were paid, a move the group made after determining that it "manifestly became impossible to secure sufficient help except by paying salaries." According to the group's summary report, the relief work attracted "flotsam and jetsam" from the treaty ports, foreigners who turned out to be "absolutely unemployable and their expenses to and from the field was a dead loss. The moral behavior of some of these men in the field raised disturbing questions as to the effect on American prestige." Baker, ed., "Report," 14, 17, 209-212, 225, 229.

generally believe in instituting public works, with giving as a corollary."[120]) This section will suggest that, beyond the blinders to native relief activity created by the social insulation of many along the mission network, and beyond the cultural hubris explored in our next chapter, this exclusive emphasis on work relief by the largest foreign relief organization in 1920-21 China acted as another way in which Chinese relief efforts over the year were ignored as inadequate or dismissed as hopelessly backward by foreign observers.

The American Red Cross plan offered a "lesson of organization for the construction of public improvements" that the Chinese might learn, the group explained, just "as they have learned others which have been set by their Western friends." For this "modernization" of native relief, foreigners would team up with China's "enlightened" circles. "Knowing the revulsion of feeling which Chinese would experience upon the bald announcement of such a policy," the report continued on the matter of excluding the most vulnerable from its relief rolls, the Red Cross "sought to have influential Chinese choose this policy of their own free will."[121] One of these "influential" Chinese was, presumably, the University of Virginia-trained Yan Huiqing, then serving, as we have seen, as head of the Chinese Foreign Ministry. The great famine of 1920-21 marked "the first time in China that a trial was made with the principle of making the sufferers render some return in the form of labor for the relief they received," Yan later recalled in his memoirs. "At first a certain section of the public considered this type of relief as harsh and repugnant, but soon the reasonableness of its was appreciated and the principle had been gradually adopted by other philanthropic organizations."[122] The notion that constructive components to relief programs were new, "modern," or Western in origin in fact was shared by

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[120] *Peking & Tientsin Times*, 23 Nov. 1920.
[121] Baker, ed., "Report," 211-212.
[122] Aside from having had a thoroughly Western education, it is unclear why Yan may have held this opinion. Yan Huiqing, unpublished manuscript, "Yen Hui-ch'ing, Box 1, Folder 'Yen, W.W. Chapters VI-XI,'" (Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University), 194.

both foreign and Chinese observers in 1920-21, despite the fact that Chinese society stretching back to its classical period had developed levels of state and social organization sufficient to produce river and irrigation works sustaining one of the greatest concentrations of humanity, and that work relief – *yi gong dai zhen* – on these same works had long been a key component to flood or famine relief programs both by various levels of the state bureaucracy or by local elites at the village level. As Pierre-Étienne Will has pointed out, work relief in Zhili under the Qing had not only extended relief policy beyond "stop-gap" measures of sustenance to longer-term solutions to the threat of flood or drought such as dyke-management, irrigation and reforestation; it had also expanded the *statutory* beneficiaries of state disaster relief – the rent and tax-paying sedentary agricultural population – to include those normally excluded from relief rolls: itinerant laborers or peddlers who were often seen as threats to social stability, the Confucian family ideal, and, ultimately, the state.[123] The dual logic behind work relief as advocated by authors of Qing statecraft, then – lessening the chances of future disruptions to the food supply and state revenue while ensuring that relief recipients were rooted down and occupied – resembled, in important ways, the reasoning put forth by foreigners and more "enlightened" Chinese seeking to "modernize" disaster relief in 1920-21 China.

Examples of work relief, then, crop up in records of the lives of local elites stretching back into the 1800s, before such projects were ever undertaken by Western aid interventions. The grave inscription of a Wei County resident recounts that during the horrific famine years of 1877-78, in addition to handing out 600 *min*, or strings of 1,000 copper cash, to the starving in his section of south Zhili, Xu Nanting raised an additional 1,600 *min* for work relief projects (*yi gong dai zhen*) fixing the stone wall in his village of Xingrangcun, "saving multitudes of the

[123] Will, *Bureaucracy and Famine*, 255-58.

poor."[124] And then in the same south Zhili county of Handan where the American Red Cross paid famine sufferers to build 46 miles of road in 1920-21, a local man had initiated similar work relief projects 60 years earlier. In the village of Suli, Zhang Zhuang, a military degree-holder of the first degree, issued grain from his household granary during a famine in 1860, according to his gazetteer biography, in order for "able-bodied men (*qiang zhuangzhe*)" from the area to build ditches and dykes as a form of relief through work (*yi gong dai zhen*) against future flooding.[125]

Over the same autumn 1920 season in which American Red Cross work projects were launched in four northern provinces, the Chinese state, and at multiple levels, was also undertaking work relief projects of its own. In September, the Interior Ministry issued funds to pay Zhili and Shandong refugees to dredge the Beijing city moat; a month later, the Soup Kitchen Provisioning Bureau selected 2,000 soup kitchen attendees in the capital for road repair work in the suburbs; then in November, a dispute over pay brought visibility to a small work-relief operation by the capital gendarmerie at Wanshoushan west of Beijing, where refugees were busy repairing a bridge (instead of the ten coppers per day agreed upon at the outset, which would have paid for daily purchases of two *jin* of grain at *pingtiao* centers, workers were reportedly shortchanged two coppers).[126]

On a more local scale, the magistrate of Anyi County, in the extreme south of Shanxi, consulted with local gentry (*tushen*) in November 1920 to hire area destitute (*jipin*) for work-relief (*gong dai zhen*) maintenance to the city wall and county roads at wages of 220 cash per

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[124] Later, in 1885, Xu – whose forbears had come to the village from Shanxi in the 1400s – donated 500 *shi* of grain, 45 *mu* of land, and a building to establish a village charity granary, or *yicang*. Fifteen years later, during the drought of 1900 when the Boxer movement swept through the area, he joined other local gentry (*shendong*) to distribute 1,000 *min* and 100 *shi* of grain to the area poor. *Wei XZ* 1929 16:39b, 19:25a.

[125] Another example of local work relief in 1920-21 is given in the modern gazetteer of central Hebei (Zhili)'s Wuqiang County. *Handan XZ* 1939 10:44b. *Wuqiang XZ* 1996 410.

[126] *Shihua*, 22 Sept. 1920. *Fengsheng*, 24 Oct. 1920. *Shihua*, 30 Nov. 1920.

worker a day.[127] And, work relief was not confined to official sponsorship and execution. A "Buddhist society headed in Peking" – presumably the Buddhist Relief Society – "gave out a quantity [of relief] to some thousands [of people] some weeks ago," the *North China Herald* reported in 1921 from a drought-afflicted section of Anhui. "The Buddhists have given out $3,000 here to be used in road and street repairs," the correspondent explained. "They pay 200 cash per day" – enough to buy daily famine rations of half a *jin* of grain for eight people – "and the men are selected from all around, changing sets of men every few days."[128]

Beyond the capital, the Interior Ministry had reportedly raised $6,000,000 in 1920 (raised in part by a $2,000,000 increase in monthly surtax revenue through the Ministry of Communications) for motor-road and railroad relief projects, including the construction of two main routes running between Shijiazhuang and Cangzhou in Zhili, and Yantai and Weifang in Shandong.[129] Such vast expenditure of public monies on infrastructure amid the food crisis did not go without protest by Chinese, particularly those outraged by reports that famine surtaxes were being diverted to highway building in regions of the country far from the famine zone. In March 1921, $450,000 of famine surtax revenue was reportedly being used by the state to build highways in Zhejiang with the labor of soldiers, according to the military governor there, Lu Yongxiang. "Originally the plan was that only famine victims should be employed," read a report in Shanghai's *North China Herald*, "but the cost of famine labour far exceeds that of

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[127] *Laifu bao*, 21 Nov. 1920.

[128] This report from late winter 1921, headlined "Famine Relief at Pochow: Energetic Work by Capable Chinese Official," offered a notably positive assessment of native relief efforts in a peripheral section of the famine field. "The official and gentry have a well perfected system for distribution," the correspondent wrote, adding, without elaboration, that "in the first distribution it works slowly." With 79,000 out of a population of 180,000 "in real suffering," seven train cars of grain had been brought in recently for distribution, on top of 200,000 *jin* of mixed grains from the central government and another 150,000 *jin* from a native relief committee. "The official seems most active and zealous in trying to save his people," the correspondent continued. "I never saw anything that looked like greater effort to save their people than these people are putting forth. Yet despite all this, people are saying that many not needing are receiving, and some of the most needy are not receiving." *North China Herald*, 12 March 1921.

[129] *Zhonguo minbao*, 3 Oct. 1920. *Zhengfu gongbao*, 3 Oct. 1920. *Aiguo baihua bao*, 6 Oct. 1920. *Xiao gongbao*, 21 Oct 1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 9 Dec. 1920. *Zhongguo minbao*, 26 Jan. 1921.

soldiers, who are paid only nominal extra pay" beyond their normal wages. "Furthermore," the story added, "the workmanship of the latter is better quality."[130]

Further complicating any neat correlation between the "modern" notion of infrastructural improvements through work relief and foreign interventions, some vocal members of the foreign community opposed the use of aid for work projects, including a Christmas Day 1920 editorial in the jointly Japanese, American and British- owned *Celestial Empire*, the weekly edition of the *Shanghai Mercury*. "In no circumstances should famine funds be diverted for such purposes," the editors insisted. "Work relief" was "only for the Government to do."[131] Similar convictions appeared in letters attached to relief subscriptions sent to the State Department in Washington. "We understand that part of the relief fund sent to that section [of China] is used for digging ditches for irrigation," Mary Tuthill wrote along with a check for $150 pooled from the "teachers and scholars of the Chinese Sunday School of Metropolitan Memorial N.E. Church" in Washington, D.C., "but we earnestly desire that this fund go directly to the people and be used for buying them food."[132]

Americans, at home versus abroad

Here we might step back for a moment to place the American aid intervention in 1920-21 China, the only exclusively foreign operation among the main international societies, against contemporary charity poor relief at home in the United States. The Washington-based schoolteacher's objection to the use of relief money for public works points to an ideological

[130] It is unclear what role, if any, foreign officials may have had in this expenditure. "Famine Surtax Used for Soldiers – Startling Statement by Chekiang Tuchun," *North China Herald*, 19 March 1921.
[131] "Famine Questions," editorial, *Celestial Empire*, 25 Dec. 1920.
[132] The State Department in turn relayed instructions to the U.S. legation in Beijing to turn over the sum to "some local organization for the relief of famine sufferers." Tuthill to Colby, letter, 10 Nov. 1920. Adee to Crane, letter, 15 Nov. 1920, SDF 893.48g/32. Underscore in the original.

disconnect between dominant trends within charity circles in the United States and the post-war policies of one of the largest semi-official American aid agencies abroad in the 1920s.

Changes to American charity relief in this period are perhaps best charted through the prism of Buffalo, New York, the late 19th century's "City of Light" that boasted the first electric streetlights in the country and a high concentration of industrial millionaires. In 1877, the Great Lakes port city of state-of-the-art steel and grain mills had also produced the first organization of any major American city designed to coordinate its varied charities. (This phenomenon was "transplanted directly from England," according to a contemporary historian, which had seen its own growth in organized charity amid the social disruptions of industrialization earlier in the century.) Bringing together the charitable efforts of the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish communities, the Buffalo Charity Organization Society sought, in the process, to rationalize and secularize assistance to the poor, "educating the community in correct principles of relief," in the words of a later historian, while "repudiat[ing] any attempt at proselytizing."[133]

Into the 1900s, these "correct principles of relief" were designed to accustom recipients to the peculiar rigors and monotony of industrial labor. Among vocal charity figures in the region, institutionalized assistance, in which the poor received relief only under the condition of admittance to workhouses, remained preferable over free "indiscriminate" relief dispensed with less supervision at one's home (that is, "outdoor relief").[134] "Stonebreaking as a labor test was

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[133] Sampson Low, Jr., *The Charities of London: Comprehending the Benevolent, Educational and Religious Institutions, their Origin and Design, Progress, and Present Position* (London: Sampson Low, 1850). Frank Dekker Watson, *The Charity Organization Movement in the United States: A Study in American Philanthropy* (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1922; published in New York: Macmillan Co., 1922), 99, 105, 182.

[134] "There are only two methods with which we need now to concern ourselves," Josephine Shaw Lowell, a woman active in New England charities, explained at the time. "These are outdoor relief and relief in a workhouse or almshouse, or in other words, relief given to poor persons at their own homes and relief administered inside of an institution, built and maintained at the public expense and controlled by public officials." Writing in 1884, Shaw – the sister of fallen white Civil War hero Robert Gould Shaw, colonel of the Union's first black regiment – determined that "Happily for the United States, the practice of distributing public outdoor relief has not as yet obtained a very firm hold among us" since it "fails to provide that no one shall starve or suffer" because no matter

continued by the society during the winters" of the mid-1890s, the Buffalo organization recounted in a later self-history. In 1895, "at Pearl Street" and three other Buffalo shelters, crushing stones was used as a "test for applicants for a night's lodging in the absence of any public lodging houses." ("Two-thirds of the able bodied men who were receiving aid [still] refused this work," despite being roofless in an upstate New York winter.)[135]

In the depression of 1907-1908, however, the Buffalo society abandoned its "ordinary rule of giving no relief except work to families where there was an able-bodied man…for there was little work to be had." Still, for what it described as "social reasons quite as much as for financial ones," the group "decided that, where there was a man who could work, only enough should be given to prevent acute suffering – a sort of bread and water relief which would not encourage dependence on the society…'"

But by the 1910s, charity relief in Buffalo was no longer conditioned on what the society itself would later deem "fake work relief" or "unnecessary humiliation."[136] Instead, the idea of unconditional, free relief received at home – termed "Adequate Relief," a holistic approach to welfare that included proper housing, nutrition, and other needs – had begun to take hold in charity circles across the United States. "One no longer finds the aggressive and uncompromising opposition to public outdoor relief that previously obtained in charity organization circles," a historian would write in 1922. "This has been notably true in Kansas City, Denver, St. Joseph, Dallas, Grand Rapids, Detroit, Philadelphia, and Buffalo."[137]

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how "lavish" the assistance, the bulk would be "wasted" by the recipients "in riotous living." Josephine Shaw Lowell, *Public Relief and Private Charity* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1884), reprinted in Edith Abbott, ed., *Some American Pioneers in Social Welfare: Select Documents with Editorial Notes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), 153-55, 159.

[135] Charity Organization Society of Buffalo, *Fifty Years of Family Social Work, 1877-1927*, resulting from the "Conference on Family Life in America To-day" (held in Buffalo, NY, October 2-5, 1927), 43, 88.

[136] *Ibid*., 98-99.

[137] Watson, *Charity Organization*, 365.

This change was not easily won. The notion of "Adequate Relief" was first taken up by members of this national affiliation of American charities at the turn-of-the-century by Edward Devine, secretary of the Charity Organization Society of New York, after which he led a national campaign for its adoption. Ten years later at a national charity conference held in St. Louis, the secretary of the Buffalo society, Frederic Almy, was barred by conference organizers from mounting the stage to read from his own paper promoting the approach. He had to wait until the following annual gathering in 1911 Boston, where he stated that the "need for adequate relief" was "now understood in intelligent cities," and was the "most neglected subject in modern charity." "We have caused more pauperism by our failure to provide for the necessities of life, for the education and training of children, and for the care and convalescence of the sick than we have by excessive relief," Devine argued at the same conference, "even if we include indiscriminate alms." By 1927, the compilers of a fifty-year anniversary report on the organization noted that "It seems curious now that a paper so orthodox today should have been so strongly opposed 15 years ago."[138]

But, as late as 1921 along Shandong's section of the Yellow River, vestiges of Victorian "work-ethic" ideals were still driving American relief operations. "The principal value of the 'work' plan," the American Red Cross directors explained, "is to be found in the preservation of the moral tone of the community saved." The group's project in China was, in other words, as much pedagogical as practical, as much a lesson in the virtues of industriousness to, of all people, the Chinese farmer as it was a bid to pave or dig his way out of future subsistence crises. Looking ahead, Red Cross management even suggested expanding these lessons to a wider demographic beyond the some 160,000 adult males employed over the course of the famine year. "All of the above deals with the employment of men," the group noted in its October 1921 report.

[138] *Ibid*., 365.

"While the employment of women offers some peculiar difficulties, there is no other reason why women and large children ought not to be required to do something to earn their food." Lamenting the lack of "mass employment" possible through "hairnet classes, straw weaving, and sewing groups," the directors noted that "A considerable portion of the rock on the Peking streets is broken by women and children. Thus the whole subject deserves study."[139]

Such a policy had its human costs, but before we address them we should point out that, at home, the American Red Cross had gone through a bitter change in leadership earlier in the century, one that radically altered its style of operation, if not its mission. In 1904, the organization had gone from being run out of the home of its founder, Clara Barton, funded predominantly with small donations from the American public and designed to meet "any public need, not just war," into a semi-official organ receiving millions of dollars in funds from J. P. Morgan and other financial firms and housed at a Washington headquarters built with $800,000 in subscriptions matched with federal funds, what became derisively dubbed the "Marble Palace." The organization fell under the leadership of Mabel T. Boardman, the daughter of a prominent Wall Street lawyer, and was, under an Act of Congress, closely aligned with the War Department, subject to an annual Secretary of War audit, and nominally presided over by future president William Howard Taft, then secretary of war.[140] It is important to point out that

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[139] Baker, ed., "Report," 211-212.

[140] Having served as one of the first female clerks in the US Patent Office in the 1850s, Barton was "not only completely in charge" of the American Red Cross for over two decades since its founding, according to historian Foster Rhea Dulles, she "largely direct[ed] all activities and handl[ed] all funds," taking over "most of the relief work in the field." The daughter of a prosperous Massachusetts farmer, Barton also chose for the group's first international aid operation a massive Russian drought in 1892, mostly sending over corn of Midwest farmers "who had themselves felt the harsh impact of a prolonged drought." In 1904, she was ousted by Boardman, a woman half her age who had had a strong ally for the move in President Theodore Roosevelt's sister, Anna Roosevelt Cowles. "Miss Boardman represented wealth, social position and the spirit of *noblesse oblige* of her class," according Dulles. "Firmly convinced" that "Red Cross leadership should be in the hands of people who would command the support of the wealthy members of the community through their own prominence and social prestige, she wanted above else to interest more persons in her circle in the Red Cross and its activities." In a mix of apparent contempt for Barton's rural-upbringing and her very personal and informal handling of the organization, Boardman fought "vigorously" for years against the erection of a memorial to her predecessor. "Direct help [in the field by Red Cross leadership] is the

criticism of the opaque, informal recordkeeping practiced by Barton, which was one of her opponents' main justifications for unseating her, were shared by progressive members of the charity organization movement in the United States who might have otherwise shared in her unconditional approach to refugee relief.[141] The reader may recall that charges of poor recordkeeping, and the implication that it hid rampant instances of the "squeeze," were one of the main criticisms leveled against Chinese charity in 1920-21 – and as a whole in the modern period, as we will see in our next chapter. As we see here in the dismissal of a major figure in American disaster relief, though, the difference in accounting "culture" was not one between American or British charities and their Chinese counterparts, but was, in this period, largely generational. Traditional relief methods running along personal ties ran up against "modern" ones applying standards of accounting used in financial dealings between strangers spread over the globe. While gentry operators of soup kitchens in the famine field posted accounts on the walls of the facility for inspection by members of the community, missionaries in the same field, using the monies of church members from Kansas or Coventry or funds wired from consulates in China, were trained to keep standardized records by textbooks issued by the missionary press.[142] Recordkeeping was not intuitive or innate to any culture, but were rather increasingly demanded by donors sending in monies to strangers from further and further afar.

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pivot on which field aid turns," Barton, a trained nurse, countered in her own defense. "Work at the field of dying and dead, sick and starving, is not the work of a bank, and cannot be squared by its rules and still be worth maintaining." Walter I. Trattner, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Social Welfare in America* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 70-71, 101-02. Foster Rhea Dulles, *The Red Cross: a History* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), 19, 66-69.

[141] "Material should be preserved for the publications of a complete report, including a detailed financial record of both receipts and disbursements," the general secretary of the Charity Organization of the City of New York wrote in 1904. "This is not only due to contributors and to the public," he wrote in a chapter called "Lessons to be Learned from Emergency Relief in Disasters," but also in case "criticisms or controversies arise" over relief expenditure and efficiency. "The failure to publish similar reports, or, indeed, anything that can be properly called a financial statement, is one of the just criticisms made against the American National Red Cross." Edward T. Devine, *The Principles of Relief* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1904), 460-1.

[142] William I. Lacy, *Book-keeping and Business Practise for Missionaries*, with a foreword by Charles S. Keen of the University of Nanking Department of Missionary Training (Shanghai: Methodist Publishing House, 1920).

Having ousted Clara Barton, Boardman, granddaughter of railroad magnate Joseph Earl Sheffield, was also very much a product of her class, bringing a vision to the Red Cross that was out of step with trends toward "adequate" and free poor relief in charity circles across the country. "It is difficult at first to keep fraudulent applications out of the breadline…" Boardman would write in 1915. "Breadlines should be done away with as soon as possible. When material aid must be given, orders on local tradespeople for food supplies should be substituted," thus restoring the "business of the community." Breadlines "prolong the dependency of the people. This is the policy of the Red Cross." Boardman's take on the experience of the displaced was equally out of touch just as her organization mobilized aid for the war-ravaged communities of Europe and Near East. "Life in a refugee camp for many of its occupants is rather a pleasant experience in summer weather," Boardman explained, citing the use of "vacation funds in many cities" that "send mothers and children for a restful week into camp life in the country" where women "revel in the recess from the kitchen stove and washing tub."[143]

Boardman's estimation of the refugee experience, and her reluctance to offer free relief to the displaced and destitute, informed her organization's policy overseas. "Concerning the pauper class" – presumably the Chinese who turned to begging either in the off-season or year-round – "there was no hesitation on the part of this group" to exclude them from the relief rolls, explained the directors of the Red Cross in their 1921 report from China. "But the aged?" they asked rhetorically, "Ah, who could bear to see them suffer?" Deciding that there is no "perfect plan," only "some plans are better than others," the directors decided that it was "Better [to] let the few aged depend upon the charity of the local people of means." By design, then, the Red Cross operation in Shandong and three other Chinese provinces in 1920 left sizeable segments of

[143] Mabel T. Boardman, *Under the Red Cross Flag at Home and Abroad*, with a foreword by Woodrow Wilson (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1915), 67-8, 99, 160-4.

the population to the care of local elites. These included not only the aged and infirm but any surplus able-bodied men excluded from the Red Cross rolls once funds donated from the American public had been absorbed by labor and construction costs. Four family members were fed by the organization per worker, and since workmen were given twice the rations allotted to their "idle dependents," the system resulted in food costs one-sixth higher "on account of the 'work' feature." Overall, when including construction materials, "the 'work' plan is nearly 39% more expensive than the 'free' plan for an equal number of persons reached," the group determined in its end-of-crisis report, a sacrifice the Americans abroad deemed necessary to "eliminate the professional beggars, opium smokers, and all those who are crafty enough to fool the investigators." The 850 miles of road and 3,572 wells constructed by Red Cross work projects over the course of the famine year, then, were at the expense of several tens of thousands of famine sufferers turned away from free food. (For these infrastructure projects, it should be noted, John Earl Baker, chief of Red Cross operations in the country, had decided to use American soldiers from the 15th Infantry in Tianjin as work foremen – a policy the State Department belatedly deemed "extremely inadvisable," yet which continued through the year as a *fait accompli*. Afterwards, the Japanese, recently awarded control of the Shandong coast by the Treaty of Versailles, were said to be spreading rumors about the intentions of U.S. military personnel in the famine field.)[144]

Closing

To whom did these people turn? To the various native relief efforts explored in previous chapters. But this was not at all obvious to foreign commentators, who were at a loss to explain the

[144] Crane to Colby, telegram, 28 Dec. 1920. Davis to Crane, telegram, 29 Dec. 1920, SDF 893.48g/73. Crane to Colby, telegram, 13 Jan. 1921, SDF 893.48g/89. Gauss to Crane, letter, 21 Jan. 1921, SDF 893.48g/160.

relatively low death toll to date in February as international committees stepped up their relief efforts, six months into the famine. Just as their Western counterparts on the inland mission network proved remarkably insular, oblivious to native exertions in the famine zone of 1920-21, foreigners supervising work projects designed to lift the Chinese into the modern era were similarly blind to native relief around them, unable or unwilling to entertain the possibility that Chinese had, in considerable numbers, helped sustain their neighbors, hometown (*tongxiang*) friends or family, or unknown compatriots (*tongbao*) passing into their communities.

For his part, George Barbour, an American digging wells for an international relief society in the heart of the 1921 drought zone, noted only a "pitiful little band of supplicants" waving tiny branches "for much of the year" to a "dingy and dilapidated" two-foot high wood and plaster rain god figurine – but nothing in his published memoirs resembled native relief for the starving.[145] But through the spring of 1921 Barbour had been directing work relief in Shunde, today's Xingtai, where some 9,000 people had been fed daily at one gentry-run soup kitchen, as we saw in chapter two, and where one observant foreign relief team had found "independent societies for relief" organized by Chinese "in many places." "In contrast" to the primitive prayer being performed in front of the rain god, in his recollections of 1921 Barbour noted only "the action started by the Famine Relief Commission to *avert* famine," suggesting that the only noteworthy activity in the famine field was the "modern" work relief many foreigners saw themselves, quite wrongly, introducing to the Chinese relief repertoire.

With insufficient numbers of bodies piling up to constitute calamity in 1921, influential observers soon concluded that the media had in fact sensationalized the crisis. "I believe the American business public in China are almost unanimous in that the famine was muchly exaggerated in the American Press," U.S. commercial attaché Julean Arnold would write Washington after having

[145] George B. Barbour, *In China When* ... (Cincinnati: University of Cincinnati Press, 1975), 26-7.

served as a field secretary for the American Red Cross over the year.[146] Others suspected the Chinese were racially resistant to the effects of malnutrition. "It is beginning to look, now," in March 1921, "as if the amount of relief coming in and the surprising resisting powers of the Chinese people would prevent anything resembling debacle," American Red Cross China director John Earl Baker wrote his superiors in Washington. "In fact, there seems to be disappointment, in some quarters, that thousands are not seen dead in the fields, as the trains rush through the country." "The Chinese people are inured to hardship," he continued, "and such people are hard to kill, under any conditions."[147] For the international Peking committee, the survival of so many apparently unassisted Chinese was likewise a riddle, attributable to, among other things, a "mild winter" and the "surprising capacity of the Chinese" to live off tree bark and leaves.[148]

Our next, and final, chapter will explore how it was that foreign observers of the famine were so misinformed about Chinese society around them. We will do this by stepping back from events on the ground for an entirely different exercise: examining the books lining the shelves or suitcases of foreign observers to the great north China famine of 1920-21 with the aim of helping to account for the remarkable disconnect between determinations by foreigners and Chinese relief activity in their midst. After exploring to what extent Western literary production served to prejudice these observers, clouding their understandings of Chinese society while privileging the humanitarian activity of the country's international circles, we will see to what extent these faulty narratives of modern China have infected the historiography on modern Chinese famine relief. But, before we do this we might end this chapter by tracing a few threads of thought running, it appears, from this same intellectual

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[146] Arnold to director of the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, letter, 3 June 1921, SDF 893.48g/229. David Shavit, *The United States in Asia: a Historical Dictionary* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 16.
[147] Baker to director of ARC foreign operations, letter, 14 Feb. 1921, SDF 893.48g/726.
[148] Edwards, ed., *North China Famine,* 21-25.

spool, and leading even into the sciences and toward important areas of immigration and even medical policy.

The determinations of the director of American Red Cross operations in China circa 1920 were notably similar to the premises behind an already well-established genre of Yellow Peril literature in which Chinese possessed a genetic code uniquely geared toward survival. "So far as physical endurance is concerned, no people are better fitted to meet the increasing competition of races than the Chinese," wrote Josiah Strong in 1900, author of *Religious Movements for Social Betterment* and a leading clergyman of the turn-of-the-century Social Gospel movement in the United States. "They can thrive in any climate, they can survive the most unsanitary conditions, they can work in a temperature below zero or at a hundred in the shade – and all this on a poor diet. Such a people can never be stamped out."[149] Any such people could hardly be expected to generate humanitarian ideals, and on the home front, schoolchildren in the 1910s were instructed on the incompatibility of Chinese peoples with American society just as their resilience amid intense hardship like famine fueled labor tensions. "The Chinese can actually live on an incredibly small amount of food, and very poor quality at that," read *The Essential Facts of American History* in 1914. "Congress also tried to keep crowds of Chinese laborers from coming to our shores. They were arriving by the thousands, and offering their labor cheaper than Americans could afford to offer theirs," the text continued at a time when the numbers of Chinese in the United States was steadily decreasing, "It was said that a Chinaman could live on what an American would throw away."[150] "Living on only a few cents a day, [the Chinese] are willing to work for wages which other laborers could not accept," seconded *American History for Grammar Schools* in 1917. "In cities where they

[149] Josiah Strong, *Expansion: Under New World-Conditions* (New York: The Baker and Taylor Company, 1900), 110.
[150] Amid such hysteria, the secretary of the Chinese consulate in New York pointed out that the United States actually saw a reduction of 10,000 Chinese residents between 1910-20. J. S. Tow, *The Real Chinese in America* (New York: Academy Press, 1923), 36.

have settled in any numbers, they congregate in a 'Chinatown' in which unsanitary living is combined with strange customs and low moral standards, if not crimes; it is believed that they form a menace to our civilization as well as to industrial relations."[151]

But, perhaps more importantly, on the basis of the misunderstanding of Chinese society explored above, concerned members of the American medical community appeared to advocate certain types of public policy in China, namely birth control. "The man in China knows that he can obtain help from the missions or other foreign benevolent institutions and that in case of famine generous-hearted America and Europe will send food," Dr. S. Adolphus Knopf wrote from Manhattan when famine spread in north China again in 1928 amid the Nationalist so-called Northern Expedition against the warlord regimes in the North.[152] Knopf, writing an article in *The Medical Critic and Guide* under the title "The Only Effective Famine Relief," had reached the same conclusions made by academic studies earlier in the decade that wrapped dubious conclusions on Chinese social relations into more respectable, scientific terms. "Even when one receives charity from strangers, especially if he is not used to receiving free help, he may have an uncanny feeling or a sort of presentiment that something more may come of it," Maurice Price wrote in his 1924 study *Christian Missions and Oriental Civilizations*, subtitled in scientific fashion "a Study in Culture Contact: the Reactions of Non-Christian Peoples to Protestant Missions from the Standpoint of Individual and Group Behavior…" Based in Shanghai for his research, the writer continued that "This impression, unheard of and incomprehensible to many who are brought up in a sect professing to do good to others, is yet clear to the man experiencing charity for the first time even though it may be in

[151] Lawton B. Evans, *The Essential Facts of American History* (Chicago: B.H. Sanborn & Co., 1914) and Marguerite S. Dickson, *American History for Grammar Schools* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1917), excerpted in Timothy Tingfang Lew, *China in American School Text-books: or a Problem of Education in International Understanding and World Brotherhood* (Beijing: Peking Express Press, 1923), 83-85.
[152] S. Adolphus Knopf, "The Only Effective Famine Relief," *The Medical Critic and Guide*, December 1928 (reprinted in Library of Congress bound volume, unpaginated).

a Western garb of semi-condescension." "What the missionary activity inevitably does accomplish, whether it expressly wills to do so or not," University of Chicago Professor Robert E. Park explained in his preface to the sociological study, "is to bring the world measurably within the limits of a single moral universe. It tends, in other words, to create a world in which every individual has the status of a person with mutual rights and obligations."[153] "If we cannot also teach them to practice birth control we will have them more and more on our hands as time goes on," Knopf concluded on the subject of the Chinese. "A warning that hereafter there will be no more financial famine relief, will make the indifferent Chinaman realize that the time has come when he must help himself." To strengthen his point, Knopf added that he had recently met Walter Mallory, the *China: Land of Famine* author and 1920s famine relief administrator in China, at a lecture Mallory gave at the All Souls Unitarian Laymen's League of New York City: "He had come to exactly the same conclusion," Knopf added, "namely that birth control and nothing else will prevent famine in China." To reach such conclusions, Knopf did not have to limit himself to the writings of foreign residents of China so far discussed in our study: diplomats, foreign relief administrators and the missionary community. As we will see, the idea of a civilizational chasm between Western humanitarian action and a callous Eastern passivity had already achieved an intellectual hegemony shared, even, by Chinese and foreign intellectual alike.

[153] Maurice T. Price, *Christian Missions and Oriental Civilizations: Christian Missions and Oriental Civilizations: a Study in Culture Contact: the Reactions of Non-Christian Peoples to Protestant Missions from the Standpoint of Individual and Group Behavior, Outline Materials, Problems and Tentative Interpretations* (Shanghai, 1924), v, viii, 66, 285-6.

Chapter Six

"The Chinese": the discursive setting of the 1920-21 famine

Three years after the close of famine in 1921, an American living in Beijing produced what he called a "true picture of the experiences that come to a missionary" in the country, motivated by an "earnest desire to create a greater interest among our people for this wonderful land." Frederick Lee and his wife had gone through the routine processing for missionaries heading into the field, "three months of intensive language study in Shanghai" before being "appointed to an inland station in the northwest corner" of Anhui on the border of Henan, living for 18 months on the periphery of what would be the 1920-21 famine zone, then moving to the relative comforts of the southern city of Nanjing. Afterwards, Lee "set to work during a vacation period to write this book," *Travel Tales on China*, producing a "hastily written manuscript" in 1924.[1] Despite Lee's sincerity and palpable goodwill, his determinations would encapsulate the presumption of cultural authority and obliviousness to Chinese poor relief around him shared by many heading into the mission field and major cities of 1920-21, one that we will examine for much of this chapter.

Lee "had often read of terrible famine experiences before coming to China," a fact that was hardly surprising. To Westerners, China had become synonymous with the scourge of famine by the 1920s; language textbooks even used such events as lesson material, such as the China Inland Mission *Mandarin Primer*, in its thirteenth edition by 1923, whose twenty-fifth unit on "The Horrors of Famine" exposed students to the famine debacle in 1870s Shanxi.[2] "During the season of 1920-21 there was a widespread famine in North China, affecting millions of people," Lee explained in a

[1] Frederick Lee, *Travel Talks on China* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1926), preface, 9, 49.
[2] F. W. Baller, *A Mandarin Primer*, 13th ed. (Shanghai: China Inland Mission, 1923), 218-9.

brief chapter devoted to the subject of famine. "In some sections, mostly those near the railways, famine relief was prompt and adequate, and the people were well cared for," Lee recounted, but without specifying *who* had relieved the afflicted; instead he employed the passive tense, a characteristic of mission literature that often reserved the active tense for the mission community and allied organizations, such as the American Red Cross, while leaving Chinese contributors unidentified, and, if even acknowledged, in the shadows. "It is wonderful what philanthropic organizations like the Red Cross are doing in the world," he continued. "Ever first on the ground to assist in time of disaster, they do a great work in saving the lives of millions. In the recent famine, the section of China which the Red Cross took over was well organized and promptly cared for," and he followed with several paragraphs on road-work relief undertaken in 1920-21.[3] It would follow then that "Life in China is not so highly valued as in the Christian West, and the individual lives of the people are not taken into consideration at all," Lee informed his American audience. "There is such an abundance of human life all about that it affects matters very little when a few thousand or even a few million die off. Nothing much is thought of it, and little is done to hinder it."[4] In Western commentary on the Chinese examined throughout this chapter, energy and action arrive in China with the foreigner, the human counterpart to the locomotive. "My desire had been to press home the truth to all our strong, vigorous, and efficient young people, that their ability is needed in just such a land as this," Lee wrote in his preface. "The need is the call. There is no other."

Lee concedes that China "does not even lack people of true religious zeal and philanthropic energy. Here one may meet some of the best types of mankind." But, these are, implicitly, members of the country's "enlightened" circles, those who had joined hands with foreign missionaries and diplomats to form the international societies. As for ordinary Chinese, the idea of assisting strangers

[3] Lee, *Travel Talks*, 95.
[4] *Ibid.*, 87.

is alien. "Much will be done by a Chinaman to save his own family, but further than that his sympathies do not extend," Lee explained. "But let that son be another man's, and few will offer a copper to aid him, or even a cash to give him a decent burial."[5] Lee, it should be remembered, was writing from Beijing, the same city where, as we have seen, multitudes of free coppers, grain and winter clothes had passed between native hands over the course of the 1920-21 famine year.

A final point might be made on this particular product of China's foreign community, circa 1920. Dates, in its pages, are few and far between. After the Lees' 1909 departure from Vancouver, events come and go without specificity. Occurrences are rarely historicized since dates are presumably unnecessary in China; Chinese society, and thus its poor relief, is subject to a singular ideology and to static socio-political contexts and capabilities. As we will see in this chapter, foreign observers at the time of our famine rarely if ever considered the complexity of the problems before them; structural or ecological contingencies did not come to the mind of famine commentators, nor did, say, correlations between the military forays of their nationals into Chinese territory and the abandonment of traditional inland riverine infrastructure by the Chinese state in favor of coastal defense, with all its spiraling social consequences to regularly flooded inland communities.[6] In China, as we will see, humanitarian failure was *cultural*, and successes largely ignored.

The discursive climate

While the 1920 famine was one of many in China's modern period and in no way singularly shaped Western and modern Chinese understandings of relief in China, its treatment by both contemporary observers and historians later on is symptomatic of a larger misreading of Chinese society in the modern period in which residents of the north China plain are purely objects, never agents, of

[5] *Ibid.*, 88, 246.
[6] On this development, see Joseph Esherick, *Origins of the Boxer Uprising* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 133, 177-181.

humanitarian relief. Taking a step back from the mechanics of famine relief itself, this chapter aims to capture the very specific moment of American and European cultural production on "China" and "the Chinese" in which the north China famine of 1920-21 occurred by examining the literature readily consumed, and produced, by resident foreigners witnessing the famine. In addition to Catholic and Protestant missionaries in the field, some of the more celebrated European literary figures of the twentieth century were diagnosing a seemingly broken China that year, including Bertrand Russell, Somerset Maugham and St.-John Perse. This chapter will suggest that our current understanding of Chinese relief culture circa 1920 is still largely derived both from observations made then by non-Chinese with only a tenuous familiarity with China's state and its varied and disparate social circles, and from the politicized observations of Chinese witnesses to the famine whose words found privileged publication in prominent, mostly urban, news platforms that have since been preferred by historians looking back at the event. In short, the historiography on China's greatest humanitarian crisis in the first quarter of the twentieth century remains insufficiently insulated from the discursive construction of the period.

"The Chinese" had begun, in 1920, to shed the stigma of the Yellow Horde/Peril that had dominated turn-of-the-century news copy and pulp fiction, epitomized by what were arguably the first villains of an international event to be commodified for avid adult and child consumption on a global scale – the Boxers. By the 1920s, with the publication of Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth* and with the country at its nadir of public financing and political stability, "China" conjured up instead the image of honest and sympathetic, if hapless, peasant-farmers facing environmental and warlord degradation. Beginning a few years later, reports from across the political spectrum, from Henry Luce's *TIME* magazine to Edgar Snow's *Red Star over China,* presented a capable and active China in the form of communist insurgency and dogged resistance to Japanese invasion. Shared by all three periodic

manifestations of the Chinese "character," however, and most relevant to our study of humanitarian crisis, was the notion of a general Chinese tolerance for human suffering, which, presumably, could only be overcome by outside (missionary or modernist) intervention or mass (communist or nationalist) social transformation.

"Instinctive sympathy is another trait which we in the West are prone to regard as normal in creatures above the brute," Ralph Townsend wrote in his *Ways that Are Dark: the Truth about China* from 1933 as Chinese strength was reasserted in the form of the Nationalist regime. "But this view certainly cannot include all the human family." Supporting his conclusions with observations made by prominent American missionary Arthur Smith – that "'Nobody trusts anybody else in China'" – Townsend added that "the Chinese appear to be one of the notable exceptions to the higher zoölogy… They failed to develop any credo of fellow sympathy. It is that they appear to have in the very crib and core of their molecules almost complete insulation against its infection."[7] Townsend's determinations eventually found their way into *The Mind of East Asia*, by a German psychiatrist in the aftermath of the Second World War: "The East Asians' ability to endure very great physical pain may go some way towards explaining the cruelty of the Chinese and their indifference to the sufferings of their fellowmen," Lily Abegg wrote in 1949. "Many times one imagines one had attained a fair measure of understanding of the Chinese only once more to be reminded of the cruelties that interpose an unbridgeable gap between ourselves and this anciently civilized people," she added, barely five years after German society had engineered a system for herding millions of fellow humans to their deaths. "All peoples racially akin to the Chinese possess the same inhuman tendency." In addition to Townsend's work above, Abegg's notes include *Thunder Out of China* by TIME reporter Theodore White, which covered the horrific Henan famine of 1943 for an international audience, and Bertrand

[7] Ralph Townsend, *Ways that Are Dark: the Truth about China* (New York: G. P. Putman's Sons, 1933), 51-54.

Russell's *The Problem of China*, produced, as we will see, after a visit by the mathematician-philosopher during the famine of 1920-21.[8]

Stereotypes of cowardice or laziness may have disappeared in light of Chinese success in war and economics over the course of the twentieth century, but China-watchers writing in well-regarded publications still manage to cast a gross Chinese inhumanity over the millennia, in some cases led, apparently, by the problematic sources produced after the 1920-21 famine. This includes Jasper Becker's popular history of the Great Leap famine, *Hungry Ghosts*, which projects its vision of an authoritarian twentieth century China back onto centuries of Chinese social practice. Close to a century after to "*Fill full the mouth of famine*" comprised part of Rudyard Kipling's "White Man's Burden," Becker opens his first chapter – "*China: Land of Famine*," named after Walter Mallory's 1926 work of the same title – with a "people" who have "always … prostrated themselves before the wayward power of the Emperor," with "young girls … cast into the river to prevent [famine-causing] floods," with the Qing doing nothing relief-wise beyond ordering "local officials to build temples and pray" for rain, with officials who "sold grain for profit" as people ate their own children to survive, and with the assertion that "even in modern times little changed." "From the turn of the century," Becker goes on to explain, "Westerners in China became increasingly concerned with famine relief." ("When a major famine struck Gansu and Shaanxi provinces in 1920," Becker continues, apparently confusing the event with the 1928-30 famine centered in the northwest, "missionaries helped launch an International Famine Relief Commission which raised money in China and abroad," citing Andrew Nathan's 1966 work on the commission. "Altogether 37 million Mexican dollars were raised," he writes, "much of it from Western sources.")[9] In a similar vein, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Harrison Salisbury's book on China's mid-20th century leadership, *The New Emperors*, concludes that "Charitable inclinations had very

[8] Lily Abegg, *The Mind of East Asia*, J. Crick and E. E. Thomas, trans. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1952), 281-3. (Original title *Ostasien Denkt Anders*, 1949.)
[9] Jasper Becker, *Hungry Ghosts: China's Secret Famine* (London: John Murray, 1996), 9-12.

spindly roots in China … The only people who had really taken an interest in the unfortunates were Christian missionaries" while "the Chinese response to the disadvantaged was cruel and brutal."[10] As tempting as it may be to dismiss such treatments of the Chinese as dated, "orientalist" or out-of-touch with current scholarship, they include very specific charges on Chinese humanitarian shortcomings that historians of China have only recently begun to adequately address: as Joanna Handlin Smith has noted in her 2009 monograph on charity in late Ming China, hers is the first book-length study in English of the subject of premodern Chinese charity since a Columbia University study published in 1912, that is, since even *before* our famine.[11] In other words, for almost the entire twentieth century, anyone limited to the English language seeking out information on the charitable legacy of a full quarter of historical humanity has had little to which to refer. Popular histories from such writers as Becker and Salisbury, then, poke into the historical dark and, as we will see, offer contemporary moralizations into a century-old echo chamber of missionary musings and flawed narratives.

The echo chamber

The ignorance of Chinese relief successes expressed by foreign residents in 1920 resulted from what might be called "social blinders" created to some extent by plain cultural hubris and by social insulation from Chinese society at large, issues we have touched on in our last chapter. In addition, there were the books likely lining the shelves and suitcases of foreign observers that year, which, as we will see, provided both packaged preconceptions on "the Chinese" and theological convictions with which they were viewed, convictions that in fact reflected more conflicts *within* Euro-American cultures than realities on Chinese ground.

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[10] Harrison Salisbury, *The New Emperors: China in the Era of Mao and Deng* (Boston: Little Brown, 1992), 419-20.
[11] Smith, *The Art of Doing* Good, 1. Tsu Yu Yue, *The Spirit of Chinese Philanthropy: a study in mutual aid* (New York: AMS Press, 1968; reprint of the 1912 edition).

Anyone destined for 1920s China–church-going or otherwise–could pack any number of works from a genre diagnosing "problems" with the Chinese. For many bound for China, this was required reading. "The difference between sailing south for the Congo and east for China or India," explains the 1924 biography of a medical missionary to China's Northwest, was "the difference between the simple and the complex…" In other words, the missionary arriving in the Congo found that the "ground comparatively speaking [was] clear…'clear' because the social or religious innovator proceeding to Congo has no such ancient civilisation as that of India or China to face; no articulated system of religion such as that of the Hindu, Confucian or the Neo-Buddhist." So, when the assignment was 1910s Shaanxi Province, as in the case of Baptist medical missionary Andrew Young, "preparation for the East had included a certain amount of reading upon the religious and social systems at work in China…"[12] Young, a Scotsman, was hardly alone. A 1920s *Manual for Young Missionaries to China* deemed it "an excellent plan always to have on hand some good book on China," adding that many missionaries arrived after crash-courses in comparative religion, much of which stressed some moral deficit of the Chinese tradition.[13]

The Chinese "body politic" has "for generations" been "flaccid, torpid, semi-comatose," Oxford Professor William Edward Soothill related in a 1923 lecture designed, according to its printed edition, expressly for "students designated for mission work in China." While the "ancient Chinese" were in fact "religious" possessors of "a clear recognition of the value of virtue," for a thousand years the country had "no moral and spiritual renascence and lived in the depressing atmosphere of a false and enervating natural philosophy…" Buddhism's moral contribution in the early years of the first millennium was "chiefly" a "doubtful form of mercy toward animals" only

[12] J. C. Keyte, *Andrew Young of Shensi: Adventure in Medical Missions* (London: The Carey Press, 1924), 111-2.
[13] Arthur H. Smith, ed., A *Manual for Young Missionaries to China*, 2nd ed. (Shanghai: The Christian Literature Society, 1924), 26-9, 33.

adding some "weight to the quality of mercy already advocated by Confucius and other sages." Soothill's distinction between an ethical ancient past in China and its present moral malaise was nothing new, even to Chinese themselves. Soothill, the former principal of the Shanxi Imperial University, was instead invoking influential revisionist readings of the Chinese classics by one of his Victorian predecessors at Oxford, James Legge, whose translations had located monotheistic kinship between Christianity and ancient Confucianism, which was now ripe for reunion and rejuvenation through missionary vigor. The Almighty was not out to "destroy the Philosophy of the East, but will 'fulfill' it," Soothill remarks in his 1906 edition of the *Analects*, "transforming what is worthy from vain adulatory approval into a concrete asset in the nation (sic) life and character." In the figure of Confucius, his Western reader would "see distinction and dignity" in the "aspirations" of this "multitudinous race…where before a swamp of mental and moral stagnation may have seemed to be his sole environment." The "renascence has now occurred" for the Chinese, his lecture explains, "brought by agencies either directly Christian or allied with Christian forces…"[14]

Few missionaries though were arriving fresh from lectures at world-class academic institutions. Across the Protestant mission field women in fact formed a majority of Western missionaries in China – and single women nearly a third[15] – and for their needs the Massachusetts-based Central Committee on the United Study of Foreign Missions put out in 1924 a 'simple, more concrete study book for use in meetings and in the study classes for young women' destined for the mission field. *Ming-Kwong: "City*

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[14] William Edward Soothill, *The Three Religions of China: Lectures Delivered at Oxford* (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), preface, 189, 195, 206-7. William Edward Soothill, trans., *Analects of Confucius* (Yokohama, 1910), i-v. Norman J. Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China: James Legge's Oriental Pilgrimage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 252-3, 268.

[15] Traditional Chinese taboos against the mixing of the sexes meant Western women were in demand for outreach to Chinese women. Many of these missionaries arrived in China believing that 'Christianity was responsible for the elevated status of Western women; in preaching the Gospel they were only sharing what they had received in such bounty,' writes Jane Hunter. 'As one volunteer put it, it was both "the heinousness of heathen womanhood and gratitude for [their] own Christian womanhood" that inspired American women's service.' Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), xv, 11, 277.

of Morning Light," a "text-book" of a "composite city" of "Central China," advises its readers that "philanthropy of a certain kind was not new to the Chinese … Their charities, however, were spasmodic, accompanied with graft and carried on chiefly for the purpose of storing up merit for themselves in the next world." The upshot, these China-bound students learned, was that the rising "Morning Light" of "Christian social service attracted them. They responded to it" and with "surprising … swiftness the idea spread and expressed itself in practical ways … and (they have given) generously to famine relief …"[16]

Part of this woman-to-woman framing of missionary work were books on "pagan" women the world over designed to pique female hearts at home, a genre that included the London Missionary Society's *Women of the North China plain* from its "World Womanhood Series." Based on the author's time in "Siao Chang," a mission district "twice as large as Wales" in south Zhili, the work's section "A Typical Life-Story" asked of its reader to "Imagine yourself to be one of these Chinese sisters … First of all, there is a tremendous subtraction sum to be done … take away prayers by your mother's knee; take away walks by your father's side, when he answers your eager childish questions about the stars and the sea …though your heart and soul are very much the same as the young hearts and souls in England, your surrounding atmosphere is so different that you develop differently. The conversation you hear is often sordid and soiled, full of jealousies and evil gossip, cunningness and superstition. The women tell lies to

[16] Mary Ninde Gamewell, *Ming-Kwong: 'City of Morning Light'* (West Medford, Mass.: Central Committee on the United Study of Foreign Missions, 1924), 9, 176-7. For their part, children were offered the *True Tales About a Chinese Boy and His Friends* from the same Committee in 1918, a book whose "main effect", according to an introduction by a faculty member of Columbia University's Teacher's College, was "to impress one with the limitless possibilities for good, if proper help could be extended to the Chinese." Among these Chinese was a photographed "granny" (the author had "found hundreds like her. In all their lives they had never heard a single beautiful song, nor had one happy day…") and a begging blind man fearing the "Beggar Chief would beat him" for returning with his day's meager collection of coppers just before "a silver dime" drops into his can, "one hundred cash all at once!", followed by the sound of "queer English speech…" Evelyn Worthley Sites, *Mook: True Tales About a Chinese Boy and His Friends*, with an introduction by F. M. McMurry (West Medford, Mass.: The Central Committee on the United Study of Foreign Missions, 1918), 11-2, 52-70.

shield the children they love, the men use craft and bullying to gain their own way …"[17] Such a setting was hardly conducive to human fellowship or random acts of kindness.

Nor was this necessarily the reader's first opportunity to consume such bleak takes on the rural Chinese life experience. The London Missionary Society was in 1920 advertising that its Livingstone Bookstore in Westminster "caters for all the needs of the Sunday School Teacher and Missionary Worker," a service that included Chinese-style sets and costume rental for both adult and children's stage dramas. Selections included *Blind Chang: a Missionary Drama*, which opens with two Chinese robbers preparing to pounce on the blind hero who has "heard that the white doctor" in Mukden "can give him back his sight" while Boxers threaten to torture a compatriot foolish enough to lavish hope on the "foreign devil;" *Bao's Adventure: a Chinese Play in Two Acts*, which contrasts the avaricious and useless Chinese "priest-doctor" with a "Dr. Hope" and a "Nurse Well" (the latter prescribing prayer for Bao's maimed leg); and *The Way of the Merciful: a Chinese Play in Three Acts*, which again contrasts mercenary native doctors with white doctors laurelled with lines like "our wonderful foreigner … the beloved physician at Tsang Chou" – or Cang, the county we explored in our tour of the famine zone in chapter two. As transparent as these caricatures may appear, one wonders what effect they may have had on the British parishioners who, while rising during each performance to sing "certain appropriate hymns between the Acts," as the script booklet suggested they do, also might have attended the pre-performance "talks or discussions on the subject [each play] presents."[18]

This staging of an inhuman "China" for everyday European consumption was anything but novel, reaching back beyond London's Great Missionary Exhibition of 1909 and its hundreds of costumed

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[17] Ethel S. Livens, *Women of the North China Plain* (London: London Missionary Society, 1920), 12-4.
[18] Phyllis M. Higgs, *Blind Chang: a Missionary Drama* (Westminster: London Missionary Society, 1920), 3, 13; H. D. Cotton, *Bao's Adventure: a Chinese Play in Two Acts* (Westminster: London Missionary Society, [1920?]), 1, 14; Vera E. Walker, *The Way of the Merciful: a Chinese Play in Three Acts* (Westminster: London Missionary Society, [1920?]), 2, 8.

missionaries recreating Chinese (along with African and Indian) "daily life"[19] to 1860s French school concert performances where, according to the *Annales* of a French Catholic organization for foundling homes in China, a French girl in Chinese dress posed as "A Chinese child, a child of poverty, I never knew a mother's kiss; Driven from the cradle, abandoned by my father…."[20]

The inclusion of children in the discussion of Chinese failings–many of whom would come of age in the crises of the twentieth century–was a task often taken up by the maternal figures tagging along with the menfolk in the mission field. One such author, credited for her 1892 work simply as "a Missionary's Wife," composed *China and Its People: a Book for Young Readers* in the form of a lesson for her nephew "E. H." back home and his little "brothers and sisters." "The Chinese, you know, are not a barbarous people, like the natives of Central Africa or Australia," this "Aunt Helen" explained. While she was "sorry to tell" her young audience that the Chinese were "too often hard-hearted of the sick and poor," promise lay in the fact that "they have not heard from their childhood the 'sweet story' of Him who went about doing good."[21]

Beyond Sunday school and parish-basement performances was the output from a longstanding practice of introducing home audiences to distant mission fields. In these works, blanket dismissals of Chinese charity as ultimately selfish endeavors assumed the form of a mantra, from diplomat-turned-

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[19] Eric Reinders, *Borrowed Gods and Foreign Bodies: Christian Missionaries Imagine Chinese Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 1-7. Front page advertisements in the *Times* and 500,000 parish newsletter inserts drew crowds to the Anglican Church Missionary Society event where the CMS book stall showcased a "series of new books…published for the event: four six-penny books on missionary themes; four large penny illustrated books (*Heroes of the Holy War*, *A Chinese Hero and Other Stories*, *Women of Other Lands*, *Doctors' Doings in Far-Off Lands*); six penny illustrated booklets, including *Little Honourable Eldest Son*," et cetera. The spectacle moved on to Liverpool, Birmingham, Macclesfield, Limerick and Cork.

[20] Henrietta Harrison, "'A Penny for the Little Chinese': The French Holy Childhood Association in China, 1843-1951," *American Historical Review,* 113/1 (2008), 78-9. In her discussion of child abandonment and this earliest of transnational aid groups Harrison offers parallels between realities and responses to the practice in modern Western Europe and China.

[21] "A Missionary's Wife" ("Aunt Helen"), *China and Its People: a Book for Young Readers* (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1892), iii, 14, 20-21. Elsewhere this writer mistakes her immediate climate–southern China, it seems–for the whole of the country, a practice of many foreign writers stationed there on all matters social, economic or environmental. "China is generally a damp country; there is more rain there in the year than in England," she wrote. "This is one reason why it is not so healthy a climate as our own."

Yale Sinologist S. Wells Williams's *Middle Kingdom* of 1848, revised and enlarged in 1883 (charity "thrives poorly in the selfish soil of heathenism" and only when "higher teachings have been engrafted into the public mind" would these even "badly managed establishments … promise something better")[22] to Justus Doolittle's *Social Life of the Chinese* of 1865 (charity is performed "oftentimes in consequence of a vow made before some idol for the promotion of selfish ends … more than because the donors desire … to benefit … the recipients");[23] the *China and the Chinese* of Upstate-New Yorker Rev. John L. Nevius (the existence of Christian charity is "due mainly to high moral principle, and a sense of duty and responsibility" while the "principal ingredient" in its Chinese counterpart is "selfishness," the "false religions of China" reward "meritorious actions" for "selfish ends");[24] Hong Kong Archdeacon John Henry Gray's *China* of 1878 (the "truth" was that, "as a rule," the Chinese had "little or no sympathy" for those destined to have infirmities from past acts "against the gods;" these acts were "of course

[22] Incidentally, in terms of higher teachings the poor of Williams' native New York at the time were benefitting little from what was on offer to the heathen. An 1857 official inquiry determined that "poorhouses through the State [of New York] may be generally described as badly constructed, ill-arranged, ill-warmed and ill-ventilated," with lodgings that were "very noxious, and to visitors, almost insufferable," and with many dying from little hospital care "whatever," "insufficient and poor" food, and "many instances of severe suffering" due to "little or no fuel provided in the winter." Still, succeeding generations of American sinologists kept to Williams's original diagnosis of Chinese charity: the "West has done far more to relieve suffering than the older East," the Agassiz Professor of Oriental Languages and Literature at the University of California, Berkeley, determined in 1923, two years after our famine, this due to the "influence of the Christian religion." While "China has not been entirely wanting" in welfare endeavors, Professor Edward Thomas Williams explains, "these so-called homes [for "cripples" or for the "aged"] are very cheerless institutions – a group of buildings with the simplest sort of furniture, cheap clothing, and a little rice each day, barely enough to keep one alive." Luckily, "Organized official relief of distress has been aided in the past few years by the American Red Cross and other foreign societies," Williams adds, "so that better order and more comfort than were found in early days has been maintained among the sufferers." S. Wells Williams, *The Middle Kingdom: a survey of the geography, government, literature, social life, arts, and history of the Chinese empire and its inhabitants* (New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1883), 265-6. David M. Schneider, *The History of Public Welfare in New York State, 1609-1866* (Montclair, N.J.: Patterson Smith, 1969; originally published by University of Chicago Press, 1938), 250. Edward Thomas Williams, *China: Yesterday and Today* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell company, 1923), viii, ix, 158-9, 681-93.

[23] Justus Doolittle, *Social Life of the Chinese: with some account of their religious, governmental, educational, and business customs and opinions, with special but not exclusive reference to Fuhchau*, vol. 2 (Taipei: Cheng-Wen, 1966; first published in 1865), 174-6, 196.

[24] John L. Nevius, *China and the Chinese: a general description of the country and its inhabitants; its civilization and form of government; its religious and social institutions; its intercourse with other nations, and its present condition and prospects* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1869), 213-4.

regarded as a work of merit");[25] and, lastly, still in 1920 one of the top five reads on China for resident foreigners,[26] New England-native Arthur Smith's *Chinese Characteristics* of 1894 ("In all" the charitable acts listed by the author "it will be observed that the object in view is by no means the benefit of the person upon whom the 'benevolence' terminates, but the extraction from the benefit conferred …").[27] Charitable Chinese evidently met calamities with alms in one hand, karmic abacus in the other.

None of this is to say that a notion of moral "credit" did not have currency for centuries in China – particularly in popular culture, a tradition thoroughly treated by Cynthia Brokaw[28] – only that to Protestant observers a profit-motive lay behind every good deed of the pagan Chinese; the possibility of a more complex combination of motivations – ethical, emotional, social, or otherwise – to Chinese charitable endeavors was rarely if ever entertained by these China hands. And then fixation on this

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[25] John Henry Gray, *China: a History of the Laws, Manners, and Customs of the People* (London: Macmillan, 1878), 46, 56-8.

[26] Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture and Translated Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 51.

[27] Smith's chapter on "Benevolence" deemed its subject "not at all substantiated by the facts of life among the Chinese, as those facts are to be read by the intelligent and attentive observer." Instead, the "apparent motive for a large percentage of Chinese benevolence is therefore the reflex benefit which such acts are expected to insure to the man who indulges his benevolent impulses," a principle that equally applied to the "small donations to the incessant stream of refugees to be seen so often in so many places." Smith was also quick to dismiss the charitable functions performed by China's many native-place associations. "We do not reckon among the benevolence of the Chinese such associations as the provincial clubs for the care of those who may be destitute at a distance from home," he explained. "This is an ordinary business transaction of the nature of insurance, and is probably so regarded by the Chinese themselves." First published in 1890 Shanghai by the North China Herald Office, new life was breathed into Smith's determinations in a 1930s French translation – *Moeurs Curieuses des Chinois* – by a Parisian publishing house in a series that also included Smith's *La vie des paysans chinois* and W. E. Soothill's published lectures *Les trois Religions de la Chine*. Arthur H. Smith, *Chinese Characteristics* (New York: F. H. Revell, 1894), 12-4, 186-93; Arthur H. Smith, *Moeurs Curieuses des Chinois*, B. Mayra and Le Lt-Cl de Fonlongue, trans. (Paris: Payot, 1927). Such doubts of Chinese humanitarianism may be part plain prejudice, part the need to justify the existence of missions overseas to the people paying their way back home; still, they played out unfailingly in the convictions of those in the twentieth-century mission field "Breaking Down Chinese Walls," as one American doctor entitled his 1908 memoirs from a central China mission, writing that "In all their religious and philanthropic gifts fear of the devil and hope for heaven play a prominent part." In similar fashion, a Sichuan-based missionary accounted for the native orphanages, free schools, and institutions for the blind or maimed in his district to the fact that their sponsors sought "secret merit" (*yingong*) in "preparation for a future life". Rev. James Hutson, *Chinese Life in the Tibetan Foothills* (Shanghai: Far Eastern Geographical Establishment, 1921), 60-8. Elliott I. Osgood, *Breaking Down Chinese Walls: From a Doctor's Viewpoint* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1908), 192.

[28] Cynthia Brokaw, *The Ledgers of Merit & Demerit: Social Change and Moral Order in Late Imperial China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). The practice appears in the context of famine relief in Edgerton-Tarpley, *Tears from* Iron, 58-9.

reputed motive stemmed from what was as much a conflict *within* Western Christianity as it was one between Christians and the eastern heathen. Spiritual self-interest was a driving force behind one of the largest and longest-lasting missionary presences in China, the Holy Childhood Association. Soliciting small donations from European children to sponsor the adoption of Chinese babies and their baptism in Catholic foundling homes (with extraordinarily high death rates), the group saw the "souls of the Chinese infants" becoming "intercessors with God on behalf of those who had sent them to heaven," in the words of Henrietta Harrison. One 1870s poem, recorded in the organization's *Annales*, has a dying French child speak of his "brothers the little Chinese" who were "To crown me with a wreath of gold. And put on my white wings."[29] More than just a humanitarian enterprise, then, this pioneering nineteenth century multinational aid group sought, through the baptism of so many Chinese babies, a greater mass of angelic advocates for the salvation of children at home. Martin Luther's vision for the reformation of the Medieval Church had lain in rejecting, arguably more than anything else, any such combination of faith and meritorious acts, leaving salvation to faith in Christ's grace alone, that is, "justification." Such dismissal of merit as a means of salvation courted execution across Papal Christendom in Luther's time; the cooling of Catholic-Protestant relations on this matter has also been remarkably recent, largely a development of the 1960s Second Vatican Council.[30]

It follows then that *Catholic* dismissals of Chinese benevolence in terms of merit are hard to come by in 1920s China; instead, it sufficed to condemn the degeneracy of a generic "paganism."[31] In

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[29] Harrison, "'A Penny for the Little Chinese,'" 78-80.

[30] The origins of Christian and Chinese notions of salvation through merit are also surprisingly similar in their eclecticism. One Protestant theologian cites half a dozen Greek and Judaic origins to its Christian forms, while in China the supernatural retribution of the early classics (*Spring and Autumn Annals, Classic of Changes*, etc.) mixed with later esoteric tenets of both Buddhism and Daoism to produce a hybrid and somewhat Confucianized popular merit system from the Ming onward. Johann Heinz, *Justification and Merit: Luther vs. Catholicism* (Berrien Springs, Mich: Andrews University Press, 1984), 1-3, 13-4, 97. Brokaw, *Ledgers*, 40, 53-5.

[31] This is not to say Protestants necessarily held a higher view of their Chinese subjects: in a manual he edited for young missionaries Arthur Smith did not shy from introducing the moral perils of their journey in a chapter on "The Spiritual Life of the Missionary": "The heathen atmosphere reveals to the missionary, as by an electric flash, in what light he is really regarded by those about him," Smith explains. "Such an all pervading atmosphere of evil must

such a fashion one French priest in the plains of south Zhili – the epicenter of famine in 1920 – introduced his home audience that year to his "*Oasis* de la Charité Catholique." There, "superstition, barbarism and pagan selfishness" had filled the Saint Enfance nurseries and orphanages with hundreds of children.[32] Or, as another French Lazarist put it in a 1921 volume, "Whoever says paganism says rapid decadence of conscience and mores, and an irremediable return to barbarism." Elsewhere in this work, Académie Française member Henry Watthé explained that the Chinese "does not stop, unless he's a Christian (if a pagan, it's an exceptional rarity!), to study the morality of his schemes or his actions. He sees but the end: money, honor, pleasure." "In fact," Watthé continued rhetorically in the Maison du Missionaire publication, "is not the *chef-d'œuvre* of Christian education this *Petite Sœur des Pauvres chinoises*, and this *Fille de la Charité chinoise* who, part of a very inferior race (in the point of view of moral conscience, mind you), can raise themselves to the level of their elders [*aînées*] in charity and generosity, namely the disciples who [seventeenth century Lazarist order founder] Saint Vincent de Paul breathed life into all over France and in our Occidental countries."[33]

As the audience of many of these missives and reports were parishioners in the home country sponsoring the very existence of these missions, members of the latter could go to great lengths to stir the hearts of potential pledgers at home. The Lazarists of the French Province of Champagne boasted a *collège français* and a towering stone cathedral on their mission grounds

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bring direct spiritual testing to all missionaries…Let us remember that a like atmosphere surrounded the first Christian missionaries and converts in corrupt Greece and Rome…the evils are precisely the same as those in the early New Testament days." Smith, ed., *Manual for Young Missionaries*, 109.

[32] Pierre Mertens, S.J., ed, *La légende de Dorée en Chine: Scènes de la vie de Missions au Tche-li sud-est* (Lille: Societé Saint-Augustin, Desclée de Brouwer et Compagnie, 1920), 58. Italics added. This ecclesiastic embrace of China's poor and illiterate was a policy a long time in the making. Starting in the late Ming, Jesuit missionaries had settled on the highest social circles of Chinese society–including the imperial court itself–for their conversion activity, but lukewarm success with China's Confucian establishment over the centuries in part led to a shift in focus by nineteenth century-Protestant and Catholic missions toward the segment of the population supposedly least set in the ways of an orthodox and proud elite. After deeming current Confucian tradition little but a moral morass, Oxford Professor Soothill thus reserved his kindest words in the 1920s for what he called the "mass of the people" who "live their simple lives, stupidly, ignorantly, and decently, often showing great kindness to each other." Soothill, *Three Religions*, 207.

[33] Henry Watthé, *La belle vie du missionaire en Chine: Récits et croquis* (Vichy: Maison du Missionaire, 1930; first published in 1921), vol. 1, xi; vol. 2, 109, 115.

at Daming in south Zhili. Raising and maintaining such a facility must have required appeals for considerable funds from Champagne and beyond. In a 1920 essay published in the northern French city of Lille, mission priest P. M. Cannepin asked the "little children of France" whether they "all, in France" don't "adore the little Chinese!" But "the adults," he went on, "are connivers, liars, hypocrites, that's for sure!" Cannepin recounted how a "good woman back home" had expressed horror over the idea that the priest was off to live among the Chinese. "They'll put you in the cangue, cut you into little pieces," she cried. "Yes," Cannepin responded rhetorically, "the adults with their almond eyes and their [*débene*] braids serve as scarecrows repelling the good people at home! But '*Little* Chinese' you adore them without even knowing them–and you're right." (The mission thus justified its new "*hospice*" in Zhili for what it called a neglected "new kind of children"–the elderly.)[34]

Finally, on the eve of the feast of the Epiphany in early January 1920, Bishop S. G. Monseigneur Henri Lécroart, head of this same south Zhili mission, prefaced a book on mission life with the question "What is true of China, is it not equally valid–more or less–for all Catholic Missions in infidel lands? What does the missionary find in his new country of adoption? He finds the pagan…above all the *lettered* pagan..." No distinction was necessary, Lécroart explained, between the "Chinese, the Hindu, the Hottentot"–rather the bishop "simply spoke of the pagan, that is man degraded, congealed, mummified in his errors; the pagan for whom justice, discretion, generosity are words meant only to hide his vices. Fortunately," Lécroart concluded, "there is still the poor, the peasant, the child."[35]

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[34] P. M. Cannepin, "Les Poupées Vivantes," in Mertens, *La légende de Dorée*, 30, 293. Italics in the original.
[35] Mertens, *La légende de Dorée*, v. Italics added. This ecclesiastic embrace of China's poor and illiterate was a policy a long time in the making. Starting in the late Ming, Jesuit missionaries had settled on the highest social circles of Chinese society–including the imperial court itself–for their conversion activity, but lukewarm success with China's Confucian establishment over the centuries in part led to a shift in focus by nineteenth century-Protestant and Catholic missions toward the segment of the population supposedly least set in the ways of an orthodox and proud elite. After deeming current Confucian tradition little but a moral morass, Oxford Professor

The bishop's determinations, it should be noted, were hardly distinguishable from those appearing in more secular French publications, which also revealed a readiness to recycle material from the English-speaking world. "They do not have our respect for human life," read Jean Rodes's *Les Chinois* barely five years after a generation of Frenchmen had been lost to the guns, gas and rot of so many Great War trenches, "among them pity is entirely unknown." "All who have written on the Chinese have spoken about their lack of character, their cowardice," continues Rodes's section "The Chinese Sensibility" in a chapter entitled "The Chinese as He Is," before going on to quote Arthur Smith's ubiquitous tract *Chinese Characteristics* and launching into a section on "le 'squeeze.'"[36]

Dust, diplomacy, and a Nobel: Anabasis

Missionary output on the Chinese was but part of a larger discursive setting for the famine of 1920-1, an intellectual climate perhaps best captured by the celebrated words of a Frenchman then posted at his country's Legation in Beijing. Alexis Leger had arrived in 1916 as the 29-year-old Third Secretary on his first overseas assignment for the diplomatic service. In letters home to France, Leger deplored the "cocoon-like mode of life" led by the diplomatic corps in their Beijing quarter and the "snobbery of its inhabitants" whose lives remained "totally unrelated to China." Leger ventured beyond the narrow confines of these circles, making, he grandly put it, "direct contact with much of the real China" during evenings over chess with the Chinese leadership and extended excursions from the capital.

Soothill thus reserved his kindest words in the 1920s for what he called the "mass of the people" who "live their simple lives, stupidly, ignorantly, and decently, often showing great kindness to each other." Soothill, *Three Religions*, 207.

[36] Jean Rodes, *Les Chinois: Essai de Psychologie ethnographique* (Paris: Librarie Felix Alcan, 1923), 151-2, 177, 186-9.

This included renting space in a small Buddhist temple on a "rocky eminence" at the northwestern outskirts of Beijing, keeping in touch with the Legation through a mounted messenger.[37] "Out here the nights are immense and empty," Leger wrote from his refuge, a "compelling pervasiveness of absence and void," which allowed him to "dream until dawn" – while his "old chief boy" from the Legation prepared his meals. Flooded valleys were at times below his perch, at others a shriveled river soon to "disappear beneath the sand" beside a "tiny rural community" that was "dying out." At "eye-level" stood the "first massive ranges" of the "Mongolian uplift" and the "pale yellow line of the first camel-routes" leading into Inner Asia. There, high above the expanse, Leger found "immense peace for the spirit," even the urge to "take up my pen again, in spite of all my longstanding resolutions to the contrary'. These 'desert expanses', he wrote his mother, have 'exerted a hold on my thoughts, a fascination that approaches hallucination."[38]

"The whole of China is nothing but dust," the young French sojourner concluded, taking his gaze over Beijing's surrounds and the Gobi desert beyond for the stretch of a country awesome in size and variation. "China is nothing but dust," he wrote to another correspondent, a "land worn down to the bone of age." And elsewhere, "What other image can I pick from all this heathen dust for you?" he asked his mother.[39] It was as though, to an imagination held hostage by this alien landscape, metaphoric skeletons unearthed by Gobi winds could, as we will see, be taken for Chinese self-worth and the national condition itself.

In March 1921, Leger laced his conclusions into a suggestive letter to an unnamed "European Lady," advising her against coming to swap the "good + sign of Europe for the – sign of Asia." It was a "question of breed, race, and blood," he explained, a "loyalty in all things to the fine onward movement"

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[37] St.-John Perse, *Letters*, Arthur J. Knodel, trans. and ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), xii, 258, 286, 312.
[38] *Ibid*., 312, 357.
[39] *Ibid*., 296, 366, 372.

that drives "us men and women" of the West. In contrast, "negation, apathy, or amnesia – the real name of which is resignation or desertion" and "all-pervasive neutrality" comprised the spirit of the East for which this Western woman was "too strong." "No, dear friend," Leger continued, "the amnesiac stare that China turns on us really has nothing invigorating." Looking out to a parched landscape, Leger mused to her that "China, like its women, has hips too narrow ever to conceive anything ample in life."[40] There, near the moment famine raged across the north China plain, Alexis Leger penned a poem for a 1924 edition of *La Nouvelle Revue Française* under the *nom de plume* St.-John Perse, a work that would win him the Nobel Prize for Literature of 1960.

There is little use here in quoting at length from this French diplomat's poetic bombshell, *Anabasis*. What matters is the "total effect" the work produces, as T. S. Eliot wrote in the preface to his 1930 translation, what Eliot celebrated as "one intense impression of barbaric civilization."[41] The validity of what transpired from these self-described moments of "hallucination" was unquestioned by its enthusiastic American translator: Leger was an "authority on the Far East," Eliot explained, simply because "he has lived there, as well as in the tropics." Militant praise came from other critics: *Eloges*, an earlier poem by the Frenchman, had "already" captured "the seas and islands of the tropics," the preface to the 1926 Russian edition proclaimed. "Now, with *Anabasis*, he achieves the conquest of Asia, the vast roof of the world." To the critics, this "conquest" was Leger's encapsulation of the Asian mind: the poem "could be understood better by an Asian than by a Westerner," in the words of the poet's official Nobel biography.[42] For this, Leger "marshals for his conquest" not the sword but the "tongue" of Ronsard, La Fontaine and Racine in a work brimming with "beauty and strength," the 1929 German edition read, capturing the "spirit of our day, that alert and heroic spirit" bearing France a "new colonial

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[40] *Ibid*., 372-3.
[41] St.-John Perse, *Anabasis*, T. S. Eliot, trans. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1949; translation first published in 1930), 10.
[42] Perse, *Anabasis*, 12, 104. Horst Frenz, *Literature 1901-1967: Nobel Lectures, Including Presentations, Speeches and Laureates' Biographies* (Amsterdam: Nobel Foundation/Elsevier, 1969), 560.

empire before its southern gates" – these "gates" presumably Marseille and other ports shuttling ships to the African possessions and beyond.[43]

Anabasis, written with China in mind, sits comfortably then with the colonial works of its day. Early in 1921, Leger returned to the theme of desolation in a letter to *Heart of Darkness* author Joseph Conrad. Here, Leger appears to be consciously conceiving of a desert counterpart to Conrad's seafaring literary canvas, most famously his 1901 tale of an Englishman's trek up the Congo to find a colleague driven to madness by the "Dark Continent." "The whole of China is nothing but dust, an ocean of wind-blown dust," Leger wrote, a "poor imitation" of the "sea itself." The "boundless earth" of Zhili and inner Mongolia was to Leger a "most perfect imaginable simulacrum of the seas – a mirror image, like the very ghost of the sea … the sea turned inside out …" China had nothing of "interest" for Conrad, Leger advised, other than perhaps a "few fine specimens of the European adventurer; and beautiful adventuresses as well, transplanted from America or White Russia …" The rest was a "vast human community, perfectly anonymous and uniform, and infinitely gregarious – an undifferentiated mass forever impervious to individualism's happiest mutations."[44] Leger could just as well have been reading out of a fellow Frenchman's tract on Far-Eastern peoples on the market a year before his *Anabasis*. "The Chinese hive is, in its own way, as perfect as a hive of bees," Emile Hovelaque explained in 1923. "But in our societies made of mixed races and influences, the European, richer in individual variation, betrays less visibly this common character of fixedness and fatalism that shines forth from this China, one in civilization and in blood, and which makes the Chinese a being in all resemblance to an insect or a plant determined by its invariable species."[45]

But it is the focus of the preface to the poem's 1931 Italian edition that strikes closest to the matter of native valuation of human life. The "genius of the poet" seized for his "fantasy" two required

[43] Perse, *Anabasis*, 104-7.
[44] Perse, *Letters*, 366-8.
[45] Emile Hovelaque, *Les Peuples d'Extreme-Orient: La Chine* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion 1923), 264-5.

elements of the epic story, the critic explained: vast space and, quoting from the poem itself, men "*of little weight in the memory of these lands*." Man, in the China of Alexis Leger-cum-St.-John Perse, was "at the mercy of the elements rather than of his own works." It was a land where "history matters, not people." In short, again quoting the poem, "*The Stranger has laid his finger on the mouth of the Dead*."[46]

Strangers were in China, as well, to feed the living, according to Leger's correspondence, only to be frustrated by native intransigence. "Nothing (is) more atavistic than the fatalism of these people," he wrote his mother in April 1918 amid an outbreak of pulmonary plague when foreign loans to Beijing for the crisis were "guaranteed," Leger writes, without specifying whether their terms were appealing to the Chinese side. "Human life counts so little to them" they set nature "free" to "solve the demographic problem."[47] Leger had apparently gleaned this idea from a meeting between the dean of the collective body of treaty port powers (or diplomatic body), then the British minister, and an again unnamed Chinese statesman in which an "offer of financial assistance" by the "Great Powers" – again without any telling fine print – for flood-famine relief was rebuffed by a Chinese content to respect the "higher laws of natural harmony" and the "demographic equilibrium." "The poor British Minister," Leger recounted, "couldn't get over (the statesman's) placidity."[48]

Here, Leger's story runs strikingly parallel with that of another newly-arrived Western diplomat destined for world stature, Joseph W. Stilwell. In the spring of 1921, "Stilwell had been in Peking only

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[46] Perse, *Anabasis*, 108-9. Italics in the original.

[47] The French diplomat might have been surprised to hear one of his American counterparts, the U.S. Vice Consul in Hankou, advise his superiors in Washington in April of 1921 that the "free gift of food by the foreigner" for north China's afflicted was like "trying to dam a river with human hands. It is malicious interference with natural laws," or to hear a fellow Frenchman touring the famine zone in 1920 wonder if "restoring a happy medium" in China's population was not preferable to any future crowding the "nervous sensibility of the Occident" might generate by relief. Huston to secretary of state, 18 April 1921, SDF 893.48g/188. Bonnard, *En Chine*, 127.

[48] Perse, *Letters*, 328. A *New York Times* China correspondent later continued this practice of having one anonymous "complacent" individual stand in for the conscience of a nation: the Chinese have a "curiously detached attitude toward these famines," the reporter wrote, offering the "typically illustrative" example of an unnamed Shanghai millionaire who had dismissed a request to set an example for potential American relief donors since, the millionaire estimated, births would outdo deaths that year in China anyway. Hallett Abend, *Tortured China* (New York: Ives Washburn, 1930), 89.

six months," we learn from Barbara Tuchman's *Sand Against the Wind: Stilwell and the American Experience in China*, "when he found an opportunity to break away from Legation life and become acquainted with China on a working level." For four months, the young Stilwell supervised the road construction in Shanxi Province of an international relief committee, "working daily with Chinese officials … playing the game of 'face,' learning Chinese habits and characteristics and interrelations" while "the wind whirled clouds of yellow dust over deserted homes." Later, "In the time between picnics and tennis with other foreign families," the future Allied commander in China during World War Two "pursued his habit of writing short stories and sketches of foreign life as he had seen it," earning him $100 from *Asia* magazine for an article on his 1921 relief experience. "The Chinese government did not make a habit of relief projects," Tuchman concludes from her subject's experience. "Emergency distribution of food stores, if undertaken at all, was never done in time to prevent mass starvation. Accustomed to the Western impulse to 'do something,' China let the foreign activists do what they could but the Oriental attitude did not insist on man conquering his circumstances."[49]

In the Fall of 1920, as we saw in our last chapter, the Chinese government had in fact been desperately seeking permission from the resident foreign powers in Beijing for a temporary increase in the Chinese customs tax in order to finance a loan for its own famine relief operations, and Chinese foreign minister, Yan Huiqing, had shown little "placidity" in his appeals for fiscal cooperation from Alexis Leger's French Legation and the other treaty powers. Ultimately, though, Yan's exasperation and the obstructionism of his foreign counterparts were relegated to archival minutia just as a young Third Secretary at the French Legation "dreamt" up matters otherwise – and, no less, at the heights of world literature.

[49] Barbara W. Tuchman, *Sand Against the Wind: Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911-45* (London: Macmillan, 1970), 88-94.

On a Chinese Screen

Leger's was not the only Western work jotted down within a short ride of a famine-riddled north China plain for an enthusiastic literary market. W. Somerset Maugham opens his series of impressions from two tours of China in 1920-1 in a strikingly similar spirit. "You come to the row of hovels that leads to the gate of the city," opens *On a Chinese Screen* from 1922. "They are built of dried mud and so dilapidated that you feel a breath of wind will lay them flat upon the dusty earth from which they have been made." Contrasted with this wasted, dust-blown Chinese capital is the Great Wall, sketched in a later vignette in which Maugham took "special pride," we learn from biographer Ted Morgan, calling it an "example of sinewy poetic prose." The wall itself stood "solitarily … menacingly … ruthlessly … fearlessly … ," Maugham writes. "Ruthlessly, for it was built at the cost of a million lives and each one of those great grey stones has been stained with the bloody tears of the captive and the outcast, it forged its dark way through a sea of rugged mountains … to the furthermost regions of Asia, in utter solitude, mysterious like the great empire it guarded."[50] In the Englishman's formulation, then, the approaches to Beijing were as decrepit, as mummified as in that of St.-John Perse while the country's famed architectural feat – the collective creation of multiple regimes over the millennia using as varied labor sources as those available to their Western counterparts – possessed the blood of so much human fishmeal. In other words, in the Englishman's self-styled "sinewy" lines – and in the poetic "conquest" of the Frenchman – China is both populated like no other place on earth and yet gravely empty, a paradox comprehensible only when expressed by wandering strangers cut off from their surrounds linguistically and culturally, men who are, it seems, so tickled by their solitude in the East to take it for a

[50] Maugham visited China for four months in 1920, and paid another visit the following year, according to Morgan. W. Somerset Maugham, *Chinese Screen*, 10, 113. Ted Morgan, *Somerset Maugham* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1980), 273-4.

cheapness in the human experience around them.[51] Compared with these acclaimed writers, their missionary counterparts proved amateurs in gutting the Chinese experience of its humanity. In 1920s China, the dirtiest job was taken up by the poets.

Maugham's thoughts at the Great Wall were hardly unique. "Nowhere is this great wonder of the ancient world more spectacular than at Kalgan, on the edge of the Mongolian Plateau," Eugene Barnett noted after serving as YMCA secretary in China for 26 years. "There at an altitude of 4,000 feet one sees it dragging is serpentine way another thousand feet to the mountain passes above." "What I remember best about that first visit to the Great Wall is a conversation I had with a Bulgarian delegate as we sat and talked on its massive ramparts," the American recounted from an excursion by train he had made during the World's Student Christian Federation conference in Beijing in April 1922. "It is not of Ch'in Shih Huang-ti, China's first emperor, that we talked – his building of the wall against the threatening Tartars, his burning of the books (China's ancient classics), or his 'burying alive' of 460 'unreliable scholars' of his time more than 2,000 years ago. We talked rather of newer storms then brewing in Eastern Europe." As we saw in chapter four, Kalgan, or Zhangjiakou, had been the destination for tens of thousands of famine refugees less than 12 months before Barnett's visit, many of whom had been cared for by the city's refugee relief society through the crisis. Such acts, though, are lost in the wind of the Mongolian uplift just as the synapses of mulling visitors slip in the direction of gore.[52]

Then, likely no Western work relevant to Republican China better captures the process of literary license transforming itself into historical fact than this same Maugham volume. By a prolific playwright

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[51] "You cannot tell what are the lives of these thousands who surge about you," Maugham confesses a few pages from the end of his string of vignettes on China. "Upon your own people sympathy and knowledge give you a hold; you can enter into their lives, at least imaginatively, and in a way really possess them…But these are as strange to you as you are strange to them…you might as well look at a brick wall. You have nothing to go upon, you do not know the first thing about them, and your imagination is baffled." Maugham, *Chinese Screen*, 234.

[52] Eugene E. Barnett, *My Life in China, 1910-1936*, with a foreword by John King Fairbank (East Lansing: Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1990), 151.

with several plays running simultaneously in early 1920s London, one of them set in Beijing, *On a Chinese Screen*'s opening vignette – "The Rising of the Curtain" – suggests the staging of a demystified, Eastern naked spectacle and by its fifth sketch "The Chinese Minister" is stripped bare. We hear of the man's "thin, elegant hands," of his "gold-rimmed spectacles," of the fact that "he had the look of a dreamer. His smile was very sweet," of his "exquisite courtesy," of the way he held a vase "with a charming tenderness, his melancholy eyes caress(ing) it as they looked" with lips "slightly parted as though with a sigh of desire."[53] "But," the narrator continues, "to me the most charming part of it was that I knew all the time that he was a rascal. Corrupt, inefficient and unscrupulous, he let nothing stand in his way. He was a master of the squeeze. He had acquired a large fortune by the most abominable methods. He was dishonest, cruel, vindictive and venal. He had certainly had a share in reducing China to the desperate plight which he so sincerely lamented."[54] Maugham's travelogue follows, tellingly, with "two missionaries," an Englishman and Frenchman, who "had certainly one admirable thing in common, goodness," along with another thing, "humility" – the Englishman being a "man whose purse was always open to the indigent and whose time was always at the service of those who wanted it" (namely, "The Servants of God"); a woman whose "charity was above all things competent and you were certain that she ran the obvious goodness of her heart on thoroughly business lines" ("The Missionary Lady"); a "conscientious" British man "untiring in his efforts to suppress the opium traffic" ("The Consul"); and

[53] Maugham's sexual tastes aside, his emphasis here on the effeminate nature of his host-character reflects a *yinyang*-style dichotomy with which many Western observers, strangely enough, categorically perceived the tempers of peoples on opposite sides of the Eurasian expanse–note, for example, the aforementioned St.-John Perse's "good + sign of Europe for the – sign of Asia"–setting a delicate Chinese sedateness against a proactive Western gusto. All the while fashion and hygiene advertising in the period's treaty-port newsprint provided graphics contrasting "stooped-over Chinese scholars" with the "desired state of being," in the words of Ruth Rogaski, a suited or uniformed "man of decisiveness, virility and power" (a Japanese logo in the case of the heavily-marketed Japanese tonic of the period, Rentan). And in a marked change from what Kate Edgerton-Tarpley has called the "feminization of famine" in 1870s China, the favored image of famine victims used in relief society advertising or political cartoons in 1920 was frail old men–a weak and impotent condition widely seen as representative of the body politic itself. Edgerton-Tarpley, *Tears from Iron*, 189-210. Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 230. Famine victim images appear in *Shuntian shibao*, 28 Sept. 1920. *Yishibao*, 7 Sept. 1920. *Yishibao*, 15 Sept. 1920. *Shibao*, 30 Oct. 1920.

[54] Maugham, *Chinese Screen*, 23-6.

the Spanish nun who was "a very picture of charity" in her crowded orphanage. "I marveled when I saw the love that filled her kind eyes and the affectionate sweetness of her smile."[55]

One wonders how anyone could capture the moral fiber of strangers over a cup of tea or round of billiards as Maugham did, no matter if he could find little else in them to admire. Still, the above cast of characters leaves out the man who "was upright, honest, and virtuous" despite having "neither passion in him nor enthusiasm … there is no doubt that he would have done everything in his power to serve you" ("The Seventh Day Adventist"); or the American who, after presiding with a Chinese judge over an execution, regretfully reflected "how terrible it was to make an end of life deliberately" ("The Vice-Consul"); or the Englishman who "when the hat was passed around for some charitable object he could always be counted on to give as much as anyone else" (the chief executive at Jardine, Matheson & Co., once a major opium dealer in China). Their idiosyncrasies aside, China's good Samaritans of 1920 were Western-bred. In his introduction to what he calls this "remarkable travel book," Michael Wood notes Maugham's reputation for, as Maugham himself put it, "making men out worse than they are." "I do not think I have done this," Maugham once protested. "All I have done is to bring into prominence certain traits that many writers shut their eyes to."[56] Oddly, when China is the subject, Maugham's purported misanthropy matches the message of Sunday-school dramas back home.[57]

What is significant here is not that corruption might have sprung to Maugham's mind during his ministerial visit – official graft was doubtless a grave problem – but that his caricature could be so stridently unequivocal, parroting, in fact, an already well-established genre satirizing Chinese officialdom that had been freely printed in the safety of the foreign concessions since the late Qing.

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[55] *Ibid*., 35-9, 47-54, 145-6, 159, 169, 212, 229.
[56] Michael Wood, introduction to Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen* (New York: Arno Press, 1977), n.p.
[57] In a recent work, Frances Wood sees Maugham as 'much harder on the Europeans and Americans he met' in China, which is correct if one limits one's analysis, as she does, to Maugham's preference for the *Chinese aesthetic* versus the more philistine tastes of the foreign missionary or commercial crowd. Frances Wood, *The Lure of China: Writers from Marco Polo to J.G. Ballard* (San Francisco: Long River Press, 2009), 119-27.

This included the fictional *Reminiscences of a Chinese Official: Revelations of Official Life Under the Manchus*, with a chapter entitled "How to Get Rich Through Relief Work," which had been serialized by the time of Maugham's visit in both the *Peking Gazette* and the *China Illustrated Review*. (When reprinting the series in book form in 1922, editors at the Tientsin Press in the north China treaty port of Tianjin assured their readers that "there has been no marked improvement in the competence or integrity of local officials under the Republic." This prevalence of fiction and newspaper copy indicting Chinese officialdom might help explain how an American traveling the following year in north China could so confidently inform his readers that "for centuries the 'squeeze' connected with the building of the dikes, or even their maintenance, has been one of the richest perquisites of certain official positions." His solution was no less surprising. "Perhaps this is why the latest task of wrestling the Yellow River," he continued, "has been given to an American firm established in China.")[58] The main problem, though, with this bestselling *Reminiscences of a Chinese Official* (variously titled in English *Officialdom Unmasked*) is that Li Boyuan, compiling it from 1901 to 1905 while cloistered in Shanghai editing tabloids heavy with coverage of the city's notorious entertainment scene, had no experience at all with his country's extensive river works. "The tales collected [by Li] were current gossip about official circles strung together into a novel, but without much variety," author Lu Xun wrote in his capacity as a contemporary literary critic, and "It was only the general interest in the subject" of state corruption and collapse "at the time that made this novel famous overnight."[59] Significantly, *The Travels of Lao Ts'an* (*Laocan youji*), the post-Boxer satirical

[58] Completed in 1905, the work of fiction charts the exploits of a Qing official intent on milking his post as director of a river works project, firing the "old accountant" and putting his own man in place before making a killing by installing "old half-rotten timbers" billed to the state at full price. Half a million silver taels were remitted from Shanghai charities and other provinces, so went the tale, of which 300,000 were grafted – no petty indictment of a system on which the fate of many millions rested so precariously. Anonymous (Li Boyuan), *Reminiscences of a Chinese Official: Revelations of Official Life Under the Manchus*. Reprinted from the *Peking Gazette* and the *China Illustrated Review* (Tianjin: Tientsin Press, Ltd., 1922), n.p. *Reminiscences* was again reprinted in *Oriental Affairs* in 1938-9. Harry A. Franck, *Wandering in Northern China* (New York: The Century Company, 1923), 305.
[59] Lu Xun, *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1959), 375-9.

novel on Shandong by the equally well-known Liu E (aka Liu Tieyun), contains much less official corruption than Li's *Reminiscences*. Liu had specialized in flood control as a student and later advised the Shandong governor on river policy, and his famous *Travels*, written after he had abandoned public service for a life in varied business and industrial ventures, depicted in fact overly upright or naïve officials as posing more of a threat to good administration than corrupt ones, which is an altogether different and more nuanced point, and one likely informed by his government service.[60]

Decades after Maugham's visit, a major 1980 biography explains how Maugham had taken "notes on the Chinese he met, such as the cabinet minister who mourned the passing of the old ways, whereas *Maugham knew that the man was dishonest and cruel*, *and a greater contributor to his country's decline than all the factors he described*." To a 1980s readership, then, this 1920 tourist's impressions had become what the writer in life "knew" to be true, despite the fact that he mixed mostly with other British and barely spoke a word of Chinese.[61] A contemporary reviewer in London's *Saturday Review* may have said it best when he wrote in 1923 that "Instead of going straight to the Chinese mind, which has such different preconceptions from ours that we cannot arrive at it however

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[60] Li Boyuan, *Officialdom Unmasked* (*Guanchang xianxing ji*), T.L. Yang, trans. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2001), ix-xii. Lu, *Chinese Fiction*, 382. Joseph Esherick's study of the Boxers offers a detailed recounting of Shandong river work failures circa 1900 that also tells an altogether different story from *Reminiscences*. While "reactionary," inland-oriented types like Shandong Governor Li Bingheng were typecast as the bane of Chinese officialdom, Li could spend *half the year* on the province's dike system, impeaching minor officials for graft or negligence along the way while managing to avoid a single major flood during his tenure. Still, pushed by the Germans occupying Shandong's main port of Qingdao to dismiss Li for his hostility to the missionary presence, Peking assigned a German-vetted official in his place, one who passed the fateful summer of 1898 inspecting militias (themselves a response to the hostile European presence) with the result that by the end of the year more than two thousand villages and thousands of square miles of farmland were underwater. While Li had had "enough straw and other materials on hand to cope with four risings of the river," his replacement "ran out in one big flood." In short, the "men and measures" with the best track records in keeping Shandong's dike system from destroying cropland feeding millions in late 1800s, according to Esherick, consistently rose from the ranks of that segment of society deemed "ultra-reactionary" by China's coastal elite (and soon by the Nationalist regime itself). The latter, meanwhile, increasingly tied to outside financiers with other priorities for the state in mind, were cut loose from the disaster-stricken populace. This sorry development anticipated a so-called "third-world" pattern experienced later in other parts of the twentieth century world. Esherick, *Boxers*, 134, 152, 177-181. On this development, see also Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Making of a Hinterland: state, society and economy in inland north China, 1853-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Ernest Young, *The Presidency of Yuan Shih-kai: Liberalism and dictatorship in early Republican China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977).

[61] Morgan, *Maugham*, 273.

straight we try to go," Maugham "shows the actual effect of China on minds with preconceptions similar to ours; and thus we learn the 'feel' of that ancient and alien civilization."[62] By 1985, though, the work's definitive Oxford edition explains that Maugham's musings are more than China's touristic "feel" – they are in fact "closer to reportage or documentary than fiction," thus "valuable for the historian and sociologist." All this was defensible, the Oxford text continues, since "Maugham had no axe to grind in China … He came simply to look at life."[63] To complete the work's metamorphosis if we are to believe one of its classifications in the British Library online catalogue in 2010, *On a Chinese Screen* has become a source on "China – social conditions, ca. 1920" and on "China – social life and customs."[64] *The Stranger,* to borrow from Leger's epic poem, *has laid claim to the Chinese life experience*.

Setting the internal conflicts of their own cultural traditions aside – secular versus evangelical, Catholic versus Protestant, literature versus reportage, etc. – the output from the pens of Western tourists, diplomats and missionaries amounted to what one historian has called a "sociology of the Chinese,"[65] a genre presuming to identify defects possessed by an entire people before prescribing a corresponding corrective action: "callousness" or "a semi-comatose" "body politic" called for mission work, "graft" or "avarice" called for foreign control over Chinese finances,[66] and so on. Still, none of this speaks to the question of what impact any of this might have had on the literate (thus disproportionately influential)

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[62] Gerald Gould, in the *Saturday Review* (London), 13 Jan. 1923, in Anthony Curtis and John Whitehead (ed), *W. Somerset Maugham: the Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1987).
[63] H. J. Lethbridge, "Introduction," in Somerset Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), v-xv.
[64] British Library Integrated Catalogue, http://catalogue.bl.uk/F/P165BVSG556VIBRBIYNE22HJ4SGQBQMH785YKJH7N62NHG71K7-00822?func=full-set-set&set_number=139621&set_entry=000020&format=999 (accessed September 14, 2010).
[65] James Hevia, *English Lessons: the Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth Century China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 60, 178, 273.
[66] Quasi-colonized China was "wise enough–unlike all other countries–to entrust certain branches of her administration to foreigners until she is capable of taking over control," according to another 1921 British study of the Chinese, Emily Georgina Kemp's *Chinese Mettle*. In the meantime, China's "vital need" was for "honest, incorruptible, educated Chinese" to step up and "save their country," which was "steadily *moving forward*," with the "mettle of the race," its "temperamental characteristics," undergoing "as great a change as the social fabric." Emily Georgina Kemp, *Chinese Mettle* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1921), 12. Italics in the original. Soothill, *Three Religions*, preface, 189, 195, 206-7.

minority of Chinese exposed to the foreign market of ideas circa 1920. Tracing, for the moment, one significant thread of intellectual cross-fertilization in the area of Chinese moral 'deficiencies' during the famine year 1920-21 suggests that such talk was no preserve of meddling outsiders. It was a cosmopolitan practice transcending national divides.

The Problem of China

It would be difficult to overstate the attention showered by the Chinese press on Bertrand Russell's speaking tour of China in 1920-1. The British mathematician and philosopher's reception ranged from news photographs (rare in mainland papers at the time), full-page portraits in New Culture magazines, and news updates on his troubled health (stricken, as he was during his stay, with pneumonia) to nearly daily translations of his lectures in one of the nation's largest newspapers. Fearing the Rationalism torchbearer's words might be taken for gospel, the Beijing Christian Association even saw to shadowing his tour with a series of critical essays in its journal *Shengming*.[67]

The lecture tour, which was organized and bankrolled by Liang Qichao, then China's preeminent reformist intellectual,[68] was also a chance for Russell to venture into the genre of national characterization. "The callousness of the Chinese is bound to strike every Anglo-Saxon," he expounded in an end-of-tour piece in the December 1921 issue of Boston's *Atlantic Monthly*, "Some traits in the Chinese character." "They have none of that humanitarian impulse which leads *us* to devote one per cent

[67] News photographs of Russell appeared in the major Shanghai dailies *Shenbao* (14 Oct. 1920; 17 Oct. 1920) and *Shibao* (5 Jan. 1921), while his portrait appeared in both *Shenbao* and Shanghai's *Shishi xinbao* (13 Oct. 1920), and in Beijing's *Chenbao* (7 Nov. 1920; 27 Mar. 1921). Russell appeared on the cover of *Xin qingnian*'s September 1920 issue (followed by essays on him over the next two months) while his lectures were translated for much of the fall of 1920 in *Chenbao* and in the April and June 1921 editions of the Beijing journal *Shifeng*, while he was featured in the Beijing journals *Xinlong* (20 June 1920) and *Gaizao* or "La Rekonstruo" (15 Oct. 1920; 15 June 1921), *Shaonian shijie* or "The Journal of the Young China Association" (October 1920 issue), *Shichao* or "The Tide" (10 Aug. 1921) and *Guomin zazhi* or "The Citizen" (November 1920 issue) as well as in *Xinghua* or "Chinese Christian Advocate" (27 Oct. 1920; 3 Nov. 1920). *Shengming*'s critical essays appeared on 15 Feb. 1921 and 15 Mar. 1921. Mrs. Russell was herself photographed and profiled in the *Funü zhoukan* (Women's weekly) section of *Shenbao* on 20 Oct. 1920. All of the above periodicals can be found in the library of Peking University.

[68] Vera Schwarcz, *Time for Telling Truth is Running Out: Conversations with Zhang Shenfu* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 127.

of our energy to mitigating the evils wrought by the other ninety per cent,"[69] while the Chinese would "not have had the energy to starve the Viennese," using an example from the recent Great War, "or the philanthropy to keep some of them alive." Keeping to major Chinese cities during his sojourn, the Briton – hardly a harsh critic of China, it might be noted, determining elsewhere that "the Chinese" were "in many respects more civilized than ourselves and at a higher ethical level" before the arrival of Europeans[70] – concluded that "Much was done by white men to relieve the [1920-21] famine, but very little by the Chinese, and that little vitiated by corruption."[71] (Curiously, Russell's "us," presumably referring to his "Anglo-Saxons," is rendered as "*women Ouzhouren*" in the piece's Chinese translation discussed below, that is "*We Europeans* use one percent of our energies…," an exponential expansion of the original racial generalization.[72])

More than run-of-the-mill "China" material for foreign consumption, though, to the readers of the country's most established news magazine of the time, Shanghai's *Dongfang zazhi*, or *Eastern Miscellany*, the Briton's words offered a way for reformist-minded Chinese to view themselves … or at least to perceive their fellow nationals. The 1920 famine and Russell's visit had both followed a student-led patriotic protest movement, known collectively as the "May Fourth Movement" of 1919, that had been triggered by outrage over the Treaty of Versailles' ceding of former German territories in Shandong to Japan rather than returning them to China, a move many blamed on the selling out of the

[69] The mathematician hits uncannily close here to just such a ratio from the first major famine relief foray by British into the Chinese interior: as lamented by a writer in the missionary journal *China's Millions* at the time, a *full year's worth* of celebrated relief to the northern Chinese in 1878 from donors in Britain was surpassed in value by the gunboat-enforced drug-running profits sent to London from China via the Indian Government *every three days* that same year. Edgerton-Tarpley, *Tears from Iron*, 127.
[70] Bertrand Russell, "Preface," in Rachel Brooks, "The YMCA Government of China," New York Public Library Manuscript Collection, Typescript 394 Box 185, 1934?
[71] Bertrand Russell, "Some traits in the Chinese character," *The Atlantic Monthly*, December 1921, 776.
[72] Luo Su (Bertrand Russell), "Zhongguo minguo xing de jige tedian" (Some traits in the Chinese character), *Dongfang zazhi*, 10 Jan. 1922, 30. Italics added.

country by warlord collusion.[73] Editors at the *Miscellany*, a once-conservative periodical freshly stocked with activist, youthful editors in the wake of this cultural upheaval, wasted little time – less than a month – in printing "*Zhongguo minguoxing de jige tedian*" (Some traits in the Chinese character) for the *Miscellany*'s first issue of 1922, effectively reducing what would be a fifteen-chapter post-visit reflection (Russell's essay became a chapter in his *The Problem of China* monograph of 1922) down to a single analysis in which 'avarice, cowardice, and callousness' are laid out as the 'chief defects' of the Chinese. This, its *Miscellany* translator advised his readers/countrymen, was a "lesson" from the Briton to which "it seems all Chinese should give a careful reading."[74]

The notion of a new humanitarianism open to adoption by a deficient Chinese tradition was thus piped into the intellectual atmosphere in and around the 1920 famine, helping to form the discursive climate for China's looming modernization drives in much the same way that, as Ruth Rogaski has shown, a "hygienic modernity" sprang from competing Western and Japanese health administrations in the treaty ports to envelop – and help define – China's new cosmopolitan elite vis-à-vis their poorer, "backward" countrymen.[75] With editorial priorities at the *Miscellany* caught up in exercises on the Chinese *Volksgeist* – character flaws with which their newfound nation-state was supposedly constituted, as if something along the lines of a personality problem had led to what many saw as a sickly Republic borne onto a banquet table of feasting treaty powers – it should come as little surprise that when publishing a famine zone report at the outset of crisis in 1920 the editors had turned to a member of the fired-up reformist circles in the capital, specifically 23-year old Peking University geology student (and Marxism study group member) Yang Zhongjian. Returning to his native Shaanxi for summer holiday, Yang penned a lengthy travelogue of his journey through four of the five stricken provinces for an

[73] Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960). Timothy B. Weston, *The Power of Position: Beijing University, Intellectuals, and Chinese Political Culture, 1898-1929.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).
[74] *Dongfang zazhi*, 10 Jan. 1922, 29, 33.
[75] Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity*, 229.

October 1920 issue of the magazine. At the very moment that, for example, Shanxi's largest county by population, Pingding, enjoyed the distribution of 'gifts of grain and funds' from local and provincial officials and the mass purchase of local foundry products by area businessmen to keep craftsmen and their families afloat through the famine (ultimately saving, in American Red Cross estimates, some 50,000 county residents),[76] Yang reported only "empty words" from officialdom in the province, found nothing but prayers for rain from farmers and officials alike in neighboring Shaanxi, and chastised a magistrate in northern Henan for thanking the heavens for a recent pitiful "drizzle" by wasting public money on a staged opera.[77] Bleak across the board, the *Miscellany*'s only field report from what was the country's greatest humanitarian crisis in half a century found nothing resembling disaster responses of a competent people among the country's rural majority. And then the "report" was little more than an addendum to a series of lengthy exposés by its young author on the political state of his native Shaanxi, articles he had produced in 1920 for the journal of the progressive Young China Association, *Shaonian shijie*.[78] In short, one of Republican China's most prominent current event platforms made strikingly similar finds to missionary and other non-Chinese accounts of the famine field that same year, conditioning its readership for the gloomy "lesson" on Chinese "callousness" presented by one Bertrand Russell.

The dissenters

Two years after supervising an international relief depot in south Zhili in 1921, Harley Farnsworth MacNair compiled an historical reader on Chinese studies for his students at St. John's University, the mission school of the American Episcopal Church. In it, the American chose some of the

[76] Baker, ed., "Report," 93-6.
[77] Yang Zhongjian, "Bei si sheng zaiqu shicha ji" (Investigation of the disaster zone in four northern provinces), *Dongfang zazhi*, 10 Oct. 1920, 114-8. Xu, *Minguo renwu*, 1247.
[78] Yang Zhongjian, "Shaanxi," *Shaonian shijie*, 1 Feb. 1920. Yang Zhongjian, "Shaanxi shehui xianzhuang yi ban (The current condition of Shaanxi society)," *Shaonian Shijie*, 1 Mar. 1920.

late 1850s dispatches of London *Times* correspondent George Wingrove Cooke, in which the journalist explained his failure to introduce any "elaborate essay upon Chinese character" over his career in China. "It is a great omission. No theme could be more tempting, no subject could afford wider scope for ingenious hypothesis, profound generalization, and triumphant dogmatism," he wrote his British readership. "Every small critic will, probably, utterly despise me for not having made something out of such opportunities. The truth is, that I have written several very fine characters for the whole Chinese race, but having the misfortune to have the people under my eye at the same time with my essay, they were always saying something or doing something which rubbed so rudely against my hypothesis, that in the interest of truth I burnt several successive letters," referring to his dispatches to the London offices. These "difficulties" in pigeon-holing the Chinese "occur only to those who know the Chinese practically," Cooke added. "A smart writer, entirely ignorant of the subject, might readily strike off a brilliant and antithetical analysis, which should leave nothing to be desired but Truth."[79] There would seem to be little reason for MacNair, who would later serve as professor of Far Eastern History at the University of Chicago, to include such a piece other than to call out the hubris of many of his fellow "China hands."[80]

Similarly, G. Eugene Sîmon, an engineer touring China for much of the 1870s for the French state, appeared to have had in mind such works as S. Wells Williams's *The Middle Kingdom* – "the

[79] "One of the most remarkable things about the Chinese," Alicia Bewicke wrote in her *Intimate China: the Chinese as I Have Seen Them* in 1899, "is that, whilst of course it is usual for people of other nationalities to denounce their bad qualities as a nation, there is hardly a European living in China who has not one or more Chinese whom he would trust with everything, whom he would rely upon in sickness or in danger, and whom he really regards as the embodiment of all the virtues in a way in which he regards no European of his acquaintance." Elsewhere the author makes note of a Chinese practice in which a man might have an arch built in "the memory of the person who first inspired him with the idea of contributing to the relief of suffering humanity." Mrs. Archibald Little [Alicia Bewicke], *Intimate China: the Chinese as I Have Seen Them* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1899), 199, 207. Harley Farnsworth MacNair, *Modern Chinese History, Selected Readings; a collection of extracts from various sources chosen to illustrate some of the chief phases of China's international relations during the past hundred years* (New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp., 1967; first published in 1923), 20.
[80] Shavit, *United States in Asia*, 328.

standard book on China for most of the 19th century"[81] – when he included observations on Chinese charitable institutions in his own work on China published in 1887. The "infirm, mutes, blind, deaf, they are no more forgotten there than elsewhere," Sîmon wrote. "And I may say that the establishments provided for them, whether founded and supported by the State or by private charity, might well serve as models to countries where more is sacrificed to pomp and appearance than to the comforts of the inmates. I have seen instances in Chinese establishments of patients being allowed each a small enclosure of two rooms with permission to have one of their relatives with them as a nurse." Sîmon's work was in turn praised by an American-turned-British writer who as late as 1913 called it the book that "Chinese regard…as the most truthful of any to be found in Europe and America." "Without for a moment ignoring the faults of the Chinese," Maxim gun inventor Sir Hiram Stevens Maxim continued on the subject of "The Morality of the Chinese," "we may say that they have been cruelly slandered in missionary literature, and by superficial observers whose travels have been brief and restricted."[82]

Such voices, though, were readily outgunned, not least by Chinese intellectuals seeking to account for their country's litany of late 19th and early 20th century crises. Lin Yutang, arguably the best-known Chinese writer in the West in the middle of the twentieth century, expounded on Bertrand Russell's pronouncements in the late 1920s Chinese press while teaching English at Peking University after a spell at Harvard, most likely in the literary weekly *Yusi* (Spoken Fragments), edited by Lu Xun,[83]

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[81] *Ibid.*, 532.

[82] G. Eugene Sîmon, *China: Its Social, Political, and Religious Life* (Translated from the French; London: Sampson Low, 1887), 21. Hiram Stevens Maxim, ed., *Li Hung Chang's Scrapbook* (London: Watts and Co., 1913), xxviii, 207.

[83] Possibly the best example of native and foreign elite conceptions playing and feeding off each other is offered by Lydia Liu: the relationship between the literary giant Lu Xun and Arthur Smith's *Chinese Characteristics*, which was first translated into Chinese by a Shanghai publishing house in 1903. Arthur Smith had in fact also seized on the quote from *Times* correspondent George Wingrove Cooke above when introducing his *Chinese Characteristics*, assuring his audience that his own work was "not meant as a portrait of the Chinese people, but rather as mere outline sketches in charcoal of some features of the Chinese people" seen by a single observer, himself. As it goes, however, the book–and its chapters on "The Absence of Public Spirit," "The Absence of Sympathy," "Face"–reportedly came into the hands of a young Lu Xun, in Japanese translation, during his student days in Japan. Some time after abandoning his medical studies for writing, "Ah Q–the Real Story" appeared in the pages of the Beijing *Morning Post* starting in late 1921, when Ah Q himself strode onto the stage of modern Chinese literature, Lu Xun's

to which Lin contributed regularly from 1924 to 1931. In one such essay Lin wrote on "certain common racial characteristics" of the Chinese, specifically the "mental and spiritual side of the Chinese character" marked by "simplicity," "patience" and "indifference." "All these qualities are passive qualities," Lin noted, suggestive of "calm and passive strength, rather than youthful vigour and romance." Lin later recycled these conclusions in an internationally bestselling study on his fellow Chinese that "permeated with the essential spirit of the people," according to another Nobel-winning author, Pearl Buck. *My Country and My People*'s chapter on "The Chinese Character" determined that in diagnosing the "indifference" of the Chinese, Lin, a third generation but lapsed Christian, set his "finger on the fatal disease of the body politic" and the "indifference which explains the proverbial inability of the Chinese to organize themselves," ossified in a "family-minded" system that is "only a form of magnified selfishness." The Chinese "lack of the social mind" was "truly bewildering to the twentieth-century Western man" who had, in the words of the Leipzig University graduate, "received the benefits of nineteenth-century humanitarianism, with a broadened social outlook." Even the "best modern educated Chinese" were baffled by the question of "why Western women should organize a 'Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals'…To a Chinese, social work always looks like 'meddling with other people's business.' A man enthusiastic for social reform or in fact for any kind of

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vain, callous, self-absorbed, explosive, and delusional rural caricature who "enacted almost verbatim" the Shandong missionary's "script," as Liu has put it. In other words, a bestselling case of Christian mission "sociology" found fertile soil in none other than the father of modern Chinese fiction, which, from a twenty-first century perspective, has led to "sixty reprintings and translation into more than thirty languages, numerous dramatic performances, production as a film, a ten-part television series and ballet, and depictions in cartoon and woodcut form." But it did not take nearly so long for Ah Q to win Lu Xun world stature. By 1927, friends, along with a member of the Nobel Academy itself, the Swedish explorer Sven Hedin, were lobbying on his behalf for a Nobel Prize in literature–all for the comical indictment of China's rural majority. Liu, *Translingual Practice*, 45-76. Lu Xun, "Ah Q–the Real Story," from *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories*, William A. Lyell, trans. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1990), 101-72. Paul B. Foster, *Ah Q Archaeology: Lu Xun, Ah Q Progeny and the National Character Discourse in Twentieth Century China* (Lanham, M.D.: Lexington Books, 2006), 53-4, 93, 103-4, 252-61. On this see also Shu-mei Shih, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). For a notable exception to this wholesale jettisoning of Chinese tradition, see Guy Alitto *The Last Confucian: Liang Shuming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

public work always looks a little bit ridiculous…We cannot understand him."[84] According to Buck's introduction, the West Virginia-native and *Good Earth* author, Lin's exposé constituted "the truest, the most profound, the most complete, the most important book yet written about China." [85]

Closing

The ethics lesson on corruption and Western humanitarian initiative engendered by Bertrand Russell's famous visit is, regrettably, one in which the great north China famine of 1920-1 remains suspended today. Moving beyond the scholarship explored already throughout this study, such as Lillian Li's *Fighting Famine in North China*, the only mention of the great famine in Jonathan Spence's classic text *The Search for Modern China* is relegated to a section on "Marxist Stirrings," that is, to the realm of *ideas*, of *impressions* made through the tempered lenses of politicized spectators to the event. Accordingly, Spence's standard textbook narrative of modern China presents only a litany of failure to relieve the suffering in 1920 followed by May Fourth activist students "ponder(ing) such misery and its context of governmental corruption and incompetence." Anyone turning to perhaps the most comprehensive published treatment of the 1920 famine in Chinese – its chapter in Xia Mingfang, Li Wenhai, et al's *Ten Greatest Natural Disasters of Modern China* – is chaperoned around the famine zone by our very Yang Zhongjian above, the only eyewitness named in the authors' narrative before it closes with a parade of official corruption in 1921 sourced from another journalistic institution seated

[84] Incidentally, Joanna Handlin Smith opens her recent study of charity in the late Ming with a chapter on this very topic of compassion and the emergence of "societies for liberating animals" in Jiangnan and elsewhere in China. In one case, a sixteenth century Buddhist advocate "argued that one should not kill animals because they, 'like human beings, have blood and breath, mothers and children, knowledge and feelings, can feel pain and itch, and life and death.'" With Jesuit missionaries arriving in China in the period, the same monk, Zhuhong, publicly opposed, in Smith's words, "the Jesuit position…that heaven produced animals for human beings to consume…," an objection strikingly akin to those driving near-contemporary vegetarian movements across the Eurasian landmass in England. It appears both "Western" and Chinese culture contain conflicting traditions on these, and other, ethical matters. Smith, *Art of Doing Good*, 15-43. Tristram Stuart, *The Bloodless Revolution: a Cultural History of Vegetarianism from 1600 to Modern Times* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006).

[85] Lin Yutang and Hu Shih, *China's Own Critics: a Selection of Essays* (New York: Paragon, 1969; originally published in Shanghai, 1931), 135, 138. Boorman, *Biographical Dictionary*, 387-9; Lin Yutang, *My Country and My People* (London: W. Heinemann, 1939), xvi, 51, 172-5, 182.

some 500 miles from the famine zone, Shanghai's *Shenbao* newspaper. Similarly, in one of the few province-specific treatments of the 1920 famine in Chinese, Su Xinliu's *Flood-Drought Disasters and Rural Society in Republican Henan*, Marxist student Yang Zhongjian's observations again repeatedly crop up as background for another decidedly bleak account of what was, after all, the period's greatest relief success.[86]

As for Marie-Claire Bergère's statistically-rich 1973 article on the causation and extent of the Chinese famines of 1920-22, the half dozen of its pages (out of 42) that address the subject of *relief* focus almost exclusively on state failings and corruption through the eyes of American consuls and the treaty port press: the grain-price leveling, or *pingtiao*, operations, which Interior Ministry records estimate to have brought in well over 300 million *jin* of discount grain to stricken counties in Zhili alone in the Fall of 1920, are dismissed in sweeping fashion in Bergère's analysis as simply being "entrusted to functionaries who do not hesitate to speculate on their stocks, delaying their distribution." Her source: the American missionary-sponsored news magazine *China Weekly Review*, based in Shanghai. And then Bergère's damning charge that, at the outset of famine in October of 1920, the statesman presiding over the bounty of Manchuria, military governor Zhang Zuolin, "refused to deploy the railway matérial that he had requisitioned for the transport of his troops," is derived from the pages of the British daily *Peking & Tientsin Times* (as well as from a letter to Herbert Hoover from Zhang's political adversary, Sun Yat-sen, in the south of China), a problematic source, as we saw in our last chapter. Meanwhile, as we have seen, Zhang had been provisioning parallel native relief efforts in Zhili and Shandong by provincial authorities and native-place associations, according to numerous Chinese news reports, efforts that arose

[86] Li, *Fighting Famine*, 295-303, 467-8. Edwards, ed., *North China Famine*, 25. Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: Norton, 1999), 299. Li Wenhai, Xia Mingfang, et al., *Zhongguo jindai shi da zaihuang*, 135-167. Su, *Minguo shiqi Henan shuihan* zaihai, 53, 67. Famine scholar Xia Mingfang's rather superficial treatment of the 1920-21 famine has another incarnation in 2000 in the series *Bainian zhongguo shihua* (A Hundred Years of Chinese History). *Zaihuang shihua* offers a litany of official malfeasance and apathy in its section on the 1920 famine, and after noting that meager state funds were enough to feed only one-tenth of the afflicted, offers little if any indication of what might have carried twenty million people through to the spring harvest. Liu Yangdong and Xia Mingfang. *Zaihuang shihua* (On Disasters) (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubianshe, 2000), 106-109.

from separate social networks from the cosmopolitan ones sending in relief largely via the missionary community. With north China's military leadership in 1920 largely composed of the sons of afflicted rural Zhili counties – Zhang, it should be recalled, was the grandson of a man who had fled famine in rural Zhili a century before – some of them acted as conduits for relief that flowed on alternative channels from the international efforts splashed on the pages of the treaty-port press.[87] Instead, Bergère's treatment of the famine – possibly the largest to date by a Western scholar – focuses on foreign reports of a grain hoarding scandal in Tianjin and widespread fraud in Shaanxi, concluding that "No one would think of denying the complete ineffectiveness and profound corruption shown by the warlords" in the 1920-22 crisis.[88]

In sum, while the famine of 1920-1 overwhelmingly affected traditional communities in China's interior, as a historical event the famine continues to be experienced by readers today through the prism of missionary and treaty-port social circles that year and, by extension, through scholarship that overly relies on the news copy and reports of the more familiar cosmopolitan landscape they inhabited. If much of the vast north China plain lay barren in the year or so following May Fourth, 1919, Western dismissals of the very possibility of organic, spontaneous relief springing from traditional north Chinese communities fell on a Chinese intellectual terrain of great fertility – one that produced, no less, the first meeting of the Chinese Communist Party in Shanghai in early summer 1921 just as famine conditions in the North had finally let up under a healthy dose of rain.

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[87] *Yuandong bao*, 4 Sept. 1920. *Yuandong bao*, 9 Sept. 1920. *Jing bao*, 6 Oct. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 15 Sept. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 23 Sept. 1920. *Jichang ribao*, 27 Sept. 1920. *Haixing XZ* 2002 25.
[88] Bergère, "Une crise de subsistence," 1392-1399, 1380.

Conclusion

Oh! she is good, the little rain!
and well she knows our need
Who cometh in the time of spring
to aid the sun-drawn seed;
She wanders with a friendly wind
through silent nights unseen,
The furrows feel her happy tears
and lo! the land is green!

Du Fu (712-770), "The Little Rain"

As late as June 1921, some sections of the drought zone had not seen the end of famine conditions, including a farming community tucked into the mountains of Shanxi, reachable by mule train from Taiyuan, the provincial capital. From the village one afternoon, clouds seemed to caress the mountaintops up the valley as if taunting the sun-beaten spring wheat below. A bell tolled from the local temple, a constant vigil, as a rain goddess was hoisted onto the shoulder of the resident men, then the Dragon King, both raised in a sedan chair bedecked with willow branches. A foreign visitor that day, an American, followed the line of villagers with her eyes as they snaked up toward a shrine on a nearby mountain slope, with red-clad dancers leading the way, acting as coquettes waving their fans, beckoning the procession behind, waking the spirits ahead, teasing down the clouds in the distance. Actors took the rear, setting traditional tales to life as the old and young of the community lined the route, mantras leaving their lips pleading to the skies for rain. *Superstition*… The visitor dismissed her first reaction. It did not do justice to the farmer's ritual. Authored by his forebears, the procession sustained him, she reasoned, an outlet for energy and emotion when despair had paralyzed all around. Then, within moments, a

downpour rolled down the valley in sheets. The Dragon King returned on so many shoulders "like a victorious football team." The temple swelled with bodies, bands played, firecrackers took the place of the solemn bell, and, on and off for weeks, showers kissed the surrounding fields.[1]

Over the previous ten months, half a million northern Chinese had perished from hunger, exposure, and related diseases, many if not most of them members of poor farming families and rural craftsmen or laborers whose livelihoods or meager incomes withered as the crops died in the fields. Stunted growth and suffering through malnutrition and the dispossession of homes, livestock, and even children across five provinces would undoubtedly have social and economic effects for years to come. But, over the same ten months, as many as 30,000,000 people without any apparent means to survive on their own persevered, an accomplishment which "international" interventions can only partially explain. Militarization and the weakening of the central state five years into the warlord period belied a striking symbiosis between the splintering parts of the Chinese body politic, at least in the mobilization and nearly-uninterrupted flow of relief resources like grain, clothes, and coppers to the famine belt through three seasons and past recent war zones.

The multidimensional social and political response to the humanitarian crisis of 1920-21 suggests several things about China in the early 20th century and our understanding of it: the first is that the traditional disaster relief repertoire in north China was sufficiently multifaceted to withstand the social and economic stresses of the early Republican period, and sufficiently embedded in traditional social relations to withstand the collapse of China's last dynastic system

[1] The anecdote appears in Rachel Brooks, "The YMCA Government of China, with a preface by Bertrand Russell", New York Public Library Manuscript Collection Typescript 394, Box 185 [1934?], 71-74. Similar rituals in a nearby section of Shanxi appear in Harrison, *Man Awakened*, 28-9. The poem, which came to Brooks's mind as she later recalled the procession, had been published in L. Cranmer-Byng, trans., *"Lute of Jade": Being Selections from the Classical Poets of China* (London: J. Murray, 1911), 32.

and the waning of its attendant ideologies. Indeed, the efforts made along "traditional" lines in this famine seem to have exceeded those of the late Qing, if not those of the High Qing. Second, an over-emphasis on the novelty of certain historical phenomena in the literature has served to upstage other layers or spheres of social activity that were as real and relevant to events as they unfolded on the ground. The result has been an emboldened modernization narrative in which ruptures with the past are overstated and continuities concealed. In other words, this study has sought to make a corrective to the scholarly emphasis on the relief culture of "modernizing" elites in more affluent and Western-influenced south China, arguing that the prominence of southern elites and modern-style relief organization in late 19th and early 20th century disaster relief in the interior was more a function of shifting economic resources to the coasts and new forms of media than the emergence of a new "modern" civic or humanitarian consciousness engendered by treaty-port culture.

In the past few decades, historians of China have largely departed from the so-called "impact-response" model of change in China's modern period, an analytical tool popularized by John K. Fairbank in which political and social change in China after the Opium Wars of the mid-19th century were interpreted as reactions to the challenge posed by Western power and influence. While historians have since produced more self-consciously "China-centered" studies seeking to examine China on its own terms, there remains a fascination among scholars with treaty ports like Tianjin and Shanghai – or the wider lower Yangzi delta – in the early 20th century, in other words to the most obvious points of interaction with outside influences.[2] This turn away from foreign to indigenous agency, then, has not adequately left the orbit of China's coastal, more cosmopolitan communities, which has served to distract researchers from noticing key

[2] These frameworks are explored in Paul Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American historical writing on the recent Chinese past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

phenomena occurring in the interior where the vast majority of Chinese have in fact lived out their lives. Getting beyond the glare of treaty-port culture allows us to appreciate the social dynamic of inland society in a way that further dispels their past reduction into an inert historical specimen held up against a supposedly more dynamic and self-consciously "modern" social field of, say, the Yangzi and Pearl river deltas.

Such a reorientation of study then also highlights the variety of experience in China, not by emphasizing a singular and yawning cleavage between coastal and interior society but rather by suggesting the possibility of multiple modernities coinciding in China's many regions. Much of local society in 1920-21 north China continued to function at least as well as it had in the late Qing – and in some key ways such as the inter-regional movement of grain, even better – requiring us to push back any collapse of the "cultural nexus" of traditional Chinese communities at least until the escalation of civil war in 1925 and beyond. Yet, these late imperial inheritances including certain approaches to food security and poor relief, reformulated with technological advances such as trains and telegrams and other new variables, constituted as much of the "modern" Chinese experience as what transpired in the better-studied littoral of China. In short, social relief during disaster is both a window into the mechanics of Chinese society at any particular moment in time and a prism through which we might recast our understanding of the very trajectory of late imperial and 20th century Chinese history.

Grassroots relief

"Should it not be feasible and glorious if our Congress would appropriate say two hundred million dollars to save these people?" B. M. Aslakson, chief engineer of the Ashley & Co. engineering firm in Chicago, wrote President Woodrow Wilson in November of 1920. "We

could send thousands of motor trucks to deliver the food throughout the afflicted regions and could use the government's ships to transport it overseas. An act like this on a grand scale would be remembered by the Chinese people for all time."[3] "As an obscure and uninfluential citizen of this country, I want to suggest to you the advisability of passing a law allowing the United States to give to China or other starving countries, the surplus army provisions, food, clothing, etc…" James Cassell followed from Dallas in May of 1921 in a letter to President Warren Harding and members of Congress. "With potatoes in Michigan down in price as low as eighteen cents a bushel and given away in New Jersay [sic], army meat that can not be sold at eight cents per pound and corn and cotton down to nearly nothing, it seems to me that no greater act could be passed by Congress than to feed the starving countries with our waste…"[4]

No relief monies, though, would materialize over the year from the representative body of the American people, the U.S. Congress. Senator William Kenyon of Iowa had introduced a joint resolution in the Senate, which passed on February 25, 1921, to appropriate $500,000 to ship grain to the Chinese. "A mercy fleet of Shipping Board vessels, manned by volunteers crews of American naval reservists and carrying great stores of grain donated by American farmers, hauled by train to the Pacific Coast by volunteer railway employees, to relieve the starving millions of China, will soon set sail from the Pacific Coast for China," readers in Shanghai soon learned. But within a month, the Legation in Beijing was notified by telegram that the "Plan to ship corn definitely abandoned due to failure Congress appropriate funds for ocean freight," adding that "Confidentially farmers not able to deliver promised corn to Hoover."[5]

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[3] Aslakson to Wilson, letter, 19 Nov. 1920, SDF 893.48g/39.
[4] Cassel to Harding and Congress, letter, 4 May 1921, SDF 893.48g/182.
[5] *New York Times,* 25 Feb. 1921. *Celestial Empire*, 26 Feb. 1921. Lamont to Crane, telegram, 26 March 1921, SDF 893.48g/164.

As for the total of $7,750,420.33 collected in the United States in 1921 for relief in China – from President Wilson's American Committee in New York, the American Red Cross, American churches and Chinese-American societies – the State Department described these funds as coming from "exceedingly few large subscribers… the bulk of the money was received in small sums, often through cash collectives in churches."[6] The $4,688,000 raised by the American Advisory Committee working out of the Legation in Beijing, not to mention the money raised by churches for direct disbursement through their missions, was in fact collected from over half a million subscribers from 34 state committees and 832 local communities across the United States, which comes out to less than $10 from each subscriber.[7]

"This is not an opportune time at which to float Chinese bonds in the American market," U.S. Commercial Attaché Julean Arnold complained in a letter to Washington in June 1921. "It seems strange that we can raise six million dollars for famine relief when such commendable constructive projects as the Grand Canal improvement and hundreds of miles of railways," which could "avert future famines, must go begging for lack of sufficient financial support from America to undertake the work." Of course when speaking of a general "America," Arnold, co-founder of the American chamber of commerce in Shanghai, was confounding two very different phenomena: grass roots and institutional fundraising, which may have very different ends in mind**.** After months of diplomatic wrangling, as we have seen, four foreign banks, including the (American) International Banking Corporation, lent a total of $4 million to a relief effort expected by many to require $200 million. "It has been suggested that when we need money for development projects in

[6] Lamont to Evans**,** letter, 14 June 1921, SDF 893.48g/219. SDF 893.48g/244. Munroe to American Legation, telegram, 8 Dec. 1921, SDF 893.48g/245.
[7] The above amounts appear to be in US dollars. Munroe to Fletcher, letter, 25 July 1921, SDF 893.48g/221.

China," including ones designed to avert famine, Arnold wryly noted to Commerce officials Washington, "we should do better to go to the churches than to Wall Street."[8]

International relief of the famine threatening tens of millions across north China was then largely a grassroots, even farmer-to-farmer endeavor, pieced together from church alms boxes and street-side collection tins across the United States, Canada, the Philippines and elsewhere in much the same way as monies were mobilized at *huiguan*, schools, and temples across China itself over the year. When Chinese readers of *Qingnian jinbu*, or *Association Progress*, the "official organ" of the YMCA in China, were presented in early 1920 with a major profile of recently deceased Andrew Carnegie – whose story, along with J.P. Morgan's and John D. Rockefeller's, readers were told, should "prompt us to figure out how to study his good example (*shi women zhidao zenyang xue tade hao bangyang ne*)" – and when readers of Shanghai's major *Shibao* daily took in a photograph the following year of female members of the London Missionary Society in England employing a "new English fundraising method (*Yingguo mujuan zhi xinfa*)" – placards hanging around their necks with appeals for the St. Mary's Hospital and Medical School – these pedagogical exercises by the Chinese press belied the vibrant culture of charitable relief playing out in Chinese communities over the very same stretch of time.[9] More, as we have seen, the nature or scope of this native activity cannot be reduced to any singular model or social or regional origin. Rural merchant-gentry spread across Shanxi, Zhili, and elsewhere, residents of Beijing *hutong* and the garrison officers patrolling the highways into the capital, communities in distant Jilin and Heilongjiang, and warlord figures themselves giving in some cases millions of dollars, all figured in the mosaic of relief activity present in 1920-21 north China.

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[8] Arnold to director of the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, letter, 3 June 1921, SDF 893.48g/229.
[9] Qian Taiji, "Da cishan jia Kaneiji (Great philanthropist Carnegie)," *Qingnian jinbu*, or "Association Progress, the Official Organ of the Young Men's Christian Associations of China," No. 30, Feb. 1920, 69-83. *Shibao*, 27 Feb. 1921.

It remains a question today what kind of poor relief culture will rise organically from Chinese social terrain as the state recedes from the dominant role it has taken in such matters over much of the last century just as wealth disparities in the country reach levels again not seen since the pre-Communist period. What transpired in 1920-21, which was arguably the country's last major humanitarian effort before the turn to Nationalist, and later Communist, one-party rule, may well be indicative of what lies ahead.

State strengthening & war

If foreign missionaries and their touring compatriots were little qualified to diagnose the state of rural Chinese humanitarianism in 1920, as we saw in the last chapter, neither were clear-headed determinations on China's heartland to come from its post-May Fourth soul-searching, coastal intellectual and professional circles who, increasingly set on playing on par with their Western counterparts in all matters economic, scientific and military, often saw their beleaguered inland population merely as wrenches in the works driving them "forward," whatever that might mean. Viewed through the prism and remove of treaty-port mouthpieces, Republican China's vast inland or traditional population was in 1920 cast as a singular socially-retarded collective, reduced to objects for missionary or modernist programs culminating in the sporadic cultural war on the countryside by the Republican (Yuan Shikai) and Nationalist (Chiang Kai-shek) regimes, the latter far more intensely. Assuming the qualities of cultural hegemony in the Gramscian sense, appealing to statist interests of capitalist and communist stripes alike, pessimism over China's rural population had a rousing effect as the twentieth-century nation-building movement sought out a "New Culture" with which to face the new global order, an intellectual project co-opted and executed by the jousting Nationalists and Communists during the

late 1920s turn to Leninist one-party politics. Both parties vowed to lead China out of the wilderness under a morally-transformative pedagogical state.[10]

Old customs and the social relations underpinning them in rural north China did not die of inertia, in other words – destined, by their very "backwardness," for the scrapheap of history – but at the hands of an increasingly extractive and intrusive state apparatus. Rural communities that had held together across the 1920-21 famine field to an extent that allowed for considerable mutual aid and charity relief programs soon experienced a debilitating cocktail of soaring taxes, ecological crises, and the incessant requisitioning of men and vital resources by warring provincial regimes, if they were not subjected to the ravages of war itself. "The first stages of government-sponsored modernization in Shanxi were expensive, provided little in return, and were introduced at the same time as money was being raised to pay off the Boxer indemnity," writes Henrietta Harrison. "It was inevitable that the new policies were experienced [by residents of rural Shanxi] above all as an increase in taxation."[11] Early 20th century developments were similar in Shanxi's neighboring provinces to the east. The "average annual rate of growth of provincial revenues" in Hebei (Zhili) from the mid-1910s to the early 1930s was 42 percent, Prasenjit Duara points out, and in Shandong it was 56 percent, while the "annual rate of growth of gross domestic product in the nation" was only 1.08 percent over roughly the same period. "The enormous expansion of provincial income," he continues, "suggests the increasing control of the province over the resources of society." "From 1920 until 1925," meanwhile, "military expenditures constituted approximately 50 percent of total provincial expenditures in Hebei and

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[10] As anthropologist Myron Cohen has written regarding the 20th century invention of the Chinese "peasant," the ideology of the prevailing Chinese Communist Party rested on "two major tasks of cultural construction," creating "both a totally objectionable 'old regime' and a new liberated society," a narrative in which a merciless fallen feudal system played no small part. Cohen, "Cultural and Political Inventions in China," 152. See also Duara, *Culture, Power and the State*. John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, culture and class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996). Young, *The Presidency of Yuan Shih-kai*.

[11] Harrison, *Man Awakened*, 92.

closer to 60 percent in Shandong."[12] But tax hikes occurred most drastically five years after our famine in 1925-26 when, to take Huailu County in central Zhili as an example, the main land-tax doubled, the same year that the province began collecting the following year's main land tax in advance, just as much of north China descended into all-out civil war after years of intermittent fighting between military governors.[13]

In Dezhou, Shandong, the province had ordered county officials to secure over 4,000 carts for military use in September 1924, "promising to pay 50 yuan for the horse and 100 for the groom if either was killed in battle," while "Sometimes carts and men were simply seized at gunpoint," Arthur Waldron writes. In one location in the southwest of the province, "the order requisitioning 300 carts arrived at the farmers' busiest season, just as beans were being harvested and wheat planted," and the magistrate was promptly fired for not overruling the villagers' objections fast enough. Similar mobilizations and disruptions occurred in 1924 in the area of Beijing.[14]

"Up to 1925 the tax burden was endurable," Harrison writes, "but then Shanxi's governor, Yan Xishan, entered national politics," which meant entering the fray ravaging the north China plain below. For gentry Liu Dapeng, who worked in the 1920s at a coal mining office in the mineral-rich mountains of the province, tax collection by his office "became increasingly difficult," Harrison notes, "as the amounts demanded by the government grew, and in 1926, when Yan Xishan's military demands imposed really impossible levels of taxation, Liu resigned." That same year, "While carts were being requisitioned" to carry military supplies for

[12] Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State*, 67-71.
[13] Li, *Village Governance*, 37.
[14] Waldron, *War to Nationalism*, 144-9.

the Shanxi government, Harrison explains, "almost all transport came to a halt since none of the carters dared go out."[15]

Beyond their economic toll on the populace, these heightened state extractions came with a social cost as well, tearing at the fabric of local communities by introducing the predatory position of the tax agent, prompting the quitting, en masse, of once protective village-level leaders who were tasked with exacting more and more from their beleaguered communities. "The modernizing drive of the 20th-century state forced local leaders to dissociate their political vocation from the traditional cultural nexus and rearticulate it through more formal administrative arrangements with the state…," Duara writes on the case of rural Zhili and Shandong. "The role of political leadership in the village became an increasingly unviable one for all except those who, like state brokers at higher levels, saw office as an object of entrepreneurial gain."[16] Once again, we can see this in the experience of Liu Dapeng, although somewhat later than argued by Duara. In Shanxi in 1926, the very same year Liu had quit his post over soaring war levies, a dispute emerged between his neighbors and the village head over the official's failure to "provide an adequate set of accounts" while performing his tax collection duties, and the official was soon "thrown out of office by an angry crowd." Tax administration itself, meanwhile, soon led to expensive, bloated bureaucracies at the most local level. "Taxes had once been handled by five or six people in the county office," Liu complained in 1933 in the word of Harrison, "but now 167 villages all have ten people [each], all eating at public expense."[17]

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[15] In 1925, "Military expenditures shot up, and the government had no way of meeting them. In 1926 the provincial government demanded a 'loan' of 10,000 dollars from Taiyuan county, and later in the year a further loan of 22,500 dollars. The coal mines [with which Liu Dapeng worked] were responsible for 10 percent of the business contribution." Taxes would more than double again between 1925 and 1928. Harrison, *Man Awakened*, 126, 131-2.
[16] Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State*, 217.
[17] Harrison, *Man Awakened*, 110.

Down on the north China plain, meanwhile, vital fallback strategies such as earth salt production were criminalized in the late 1920s by the Nationalist state, newly in charge of much of the North. "The Kuomintang fiscal elite had predicated the development of its political economy on a strategy of foreign debt service that brought ever greater state pressure to bear on the market side of the triangular peasant economy of the North China plain, especially after 1931," Ralph Thaxton writes, an economy in which cheap earth salt had been a key input in the production of pickled food, medicine, fireworks, tea, leather, paint, and other products. Used for centuries by residents of the highly alkaline region of the alluvial Yellow River plain and still by many to carry themselves through the 1920-21 famine, as we have seen, the salt trade had become the principal means of surviving poor harvests in 1930, according to Thaxton, with many on the north China plain deriving upwards of 60 percent of household income from it. Yet in 1929, T. V. Song, the Harvard-trained finance minister of the Nationalist government, set on a course of resuming debt payments to foreign creditors by, in part, enforcing a state monopoly on the production and sale of salt, following the advice of his financial consultant Arthur Young, who was chairman, ironically, of American relief work and the American Red Cross in China at the time. The central state then banned earth salt production in 1931, creating a force of 45,000 armed salt revenue collectors – officially immune from prosecution for the killing of demonstrators against the salt tax from 1934 onward – tasked with destroying home production facilities across the North. In 1935, on the same page of a finance ministry report stating that "over 200,000 earth salt ponds and 300,000 pans had been destroyed within the past few years" across the North, it was reported that "the payment of interest and principal of foreign loans receiving service from the salt revenue was duly effected."[18]

[18] Thaxton, *Salt of the Earth*, 56, 58, 76, 80.

It should be pointed out that in many communities of the Henan and Hebei (Zhili) section of the north China plain the seemingly-innocuous bicycle first appeared around 1930 ridden by police, and that many of the same roads built by work relief projects in the very Shandong-Henan-Hebei (Zhili) area struck with drought famine in both 1920-21 gave easier access to cycling tax agents and salt monopoly police intent on inspecting and destroying backyard salt production ponds by the hundreds of thousands.[19] Missionaries themselves were apparently aware of the unintended consequences of the infrastructure created through 1920-21 work-relief projects. Back then, the Canadian Presbyterian mission in Henan had "employed one thousand men, women, and children to break stones for the roadbed, and another seven or eight thousand to build the earthworks and level the ground" for a roughly 20-mile road from Wuan, in north Henan, to Handan across the border in Zhili, Alvyn Austin writes in *Saving China*.[20] But, as Margo Gewurtz points out, "The new Chinese motor car company that exploited the Wuan to Handan road for commercial purposes put a clause in its contract granting missionaries free passage in perpetuity, an honour [the missionaries] preferred to ignore when it appeared the main business of the company might be trade in opium pills."[21]

While work-relief projects were hardly the only causes behind road construction, they did contribute to an increased accessibility, if not vulnerability, of rural communities that, in addition to bringing in relief grain, vacationers, and state agents, increased land prices for struggling farmers just as agriculture itself was becoming less profitable in, for example, Liu Dapeng's section of Shanxi. There declining village industry and trade in the 1920s led to investment by affluent households in the safer sector of real estate, an investment made more appealing by the

[19] *Ibid.*, 189.
[20] Austin adds rather dubiously that "the people were amazed that the missionaries would go to all the trouble of building roads and bridges at the same time" as distributing relief. Austin, *Saving China*, 194-95.
[21] Gewurtz, "Famine Relief in China," 15.

roads built by the American Red Cross and other relief agencies in the region. Representative of this trend was Jinci southwest of Taiyuan; "with the construction of a new motor road [the area of Jinci] was easily accessible from the provincial capital," Harrison explains. "Jinci was also famous as a tourist site because of its beautiful temples, and many of the province's leaders began to build summer houses there. During the course of the 1920s land prices in the area roughly doubled."[22]

Into this matrix of militarization, political fragmentation, heightened state extractions, civil war, and rural social disintegration, successive drought and flood disasters struck 1920s China, particularly the North.[23] The largest single organ tasked with relieving these crises was in fact a creation of the seven international relief societies from 1920-21, whose representatives convened in Beijing in September of 1921 to pool the $2 million of relief funds leftover between them into a single organization, the China International Famine Relief Commission, which was formed later that fall in Shanghai.[24] Dwight W. Edwards, editor of the influential wrap-up report *North China Famine of 1920-1921*, served as its vice chair, and John Earl Baker, director of American Red Cross operations in China, sat on its executive committee. The commission meanwhile boasted an Ivy League-heavy roster of Chinese officers: Chinese alumni of Cornell and Columbia sat on its board, as did three Chinese graduates of Yale. "In short, the contact of the CIFRC with China was through the Western-oriented, urban-based ruling class of pre-

[22] "In the 1920s bicycles and rickshaws came into widespread use when the main roads were tarred for motor traffic," Harrison adds, "as the road from the provincial capital to Jinci was in 1921. By the 1930s there were bicycles in the villages…" Harrison, *Man Awakened*, 152, 156.
[23] For a list of these events from 1912-1948, see Xia, *Minguo shiqi zaihai*, 384-94.
[24] Lamont to American Advisory Committee, 15 Sept. 1921, SDF 893.48g/239. "CIFRC Fifteenth Anniversary Book, 1921-1936" (Peiping [Beijing]: CIFRC, 1936), 3-12.

Communist China," Andrew Nathan writes in the first of several scholarly studies of the organization.[25]

The commission was also under foreign control, an arrangement explained to Nathan by Walter Mallory, who not only assisted in the drafting of the commission's constitution but also served as its executive secretary from 1922-27, during which he authored the influential work *China: Land of Famine*. Foreign control was designed to "block pressure" from Chinese officials who might wish to "allocate funds without regard to the severity of conditions," Mallory reasoned, which "could result in spreading the commission's funds too thinly to be effective," the same fears the editors of the *Peking & Tientsin Times* had expressed earlier during the 1920-21 crisis.[26] "Relief shall not tend to pauperise the population and to reduce it to a state of dependence," the commission decided at its inception, displaying an ideological consistency with American Red Cross efforts in 1920-21. Therefore, except in the case of emergencies, relief would "be given only in exchange for a fair return of labor," largely on major engineering projects around the country.[27] As it turned out, the unofficial organ, which would spend $50 million over 15 years providing what even a sympathetic chronicler such as Nathan describes as "piecemeal" responses to the country's unfolding natural and manmade disasters, would also have largely a hit-and-run presence in inland communities.[28]

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[25] Nathan, *A History of the China International Famine Relief Commission*, 23-24. Jonathan Spence, *To Change China*, 205-16. Cai Qinyu, *Minjian zuzhi yu zaihuang jiuzhi: minguo Huayang yizhen hui yanjiu* (Non-governmental organization and disaster relief administration: a study of the China International Famine Relief Commission) (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2005). Chen Yixin, "Huayang yizhen hui de nongcun hezuo yundong he Zhongguo xiandai nongye jinrong de kunjiong" (The rural cooperative movement of the China International Famine Relief Commission and the crisis of agriculture in modern China), in *Yijiuerling niandai de Zhongguo* (China in the 1920s) (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2005), 641-57.
[26] On November 16, 1921, the commission had formed with 10 foreign and 10 Chinese voting members plus a foreign executive secretary intended to tip the balance away from native control. Nathan, *A History of the China International Famine Relief Commission*, 12.
[27] CIFRC, "Anniversary Book," 5.
[28] Nathan, *A History of the China International Famine Relief Commission*, 49.

Harvests across the North had seen a steady decline from 1925, just as civil war broke out across much of central and north China; a major earthquake hit remote Gansu in May of 1927; drought-famine conditions descended on Shandong and Hebei (Zhili) later that fall; and Shanxi, Shaanxi, Henan, Suiyuan and Chahar followed with severe drought the following autumn of 1928. Due in part to the nationwide fiscal and political strife, the China International Famine Relief Commission, meanwhile, failed to hold a general meeting in the three and a half year stretch from its March 1925 "annual and general meeting" in Beijing to its November 1928 gathering in Tianjin.[29]

In May of 1928, the Japanese seized the Jinan-Qingdao rail line and, with railways paralyzed and 750,000 Nationalist troops crossing Shandong and Hebei that year in an assault on the northern warlord regimes, only a tenth of the 1,000 locomotives in the North were reportedly in use at all. In the first six months of 1929, a total of 22 grain-trains made it down from the Manchurian breadbasket to the vast famine zone covering the North, and the Red Cross reported tons of grain rotting at the Fengtian rail station.[30] Ten million residents of nine provinces stretching from coastal Shandong to inland Gansu, Shaanxi, and Suiyuan would die amid drought famine in 1928-30.[31]

Relative peace and running trains had kept the death toll from famine to 500,000 in 1920-21, as had the relative proximity of the Zhili and Henan drought epicenter to Beijing and the more affluent coast. More, the rains of spring in 1921 had put an end to what had been twelve months of drought in most places, unlike the back-to-back years of dry skies across much of the North in 1928-30. But Chinese social life had also changed in the intervening years, weakening the reciprocal relationships that had marked social relations in rural communities and the

[29] Godement, "*La Famine de 1928 à 1930*," 10. CIFRC, "Anniversary Book," 34.
[30] Godement, "*La Famine de 1928 à 1930*," 90-93.
[31] Xia, *Minguo shiqi ziran zaihai*, 395.

customary mutual-aid stemming from them. So had the political and economic reach of the Chinese state increased during the 1920s, largely in a destructive capacity for communities on the north China plain, disrupting the peasant-market economy in pursuit of fiscal targets while offering little to rural communities in return. Japanese occupation and the rise of the People's Republic would only accelerate the reconfiguration of traditional Chinese society in the following decades.

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Beijing ribao 北京日報
Beijing wanbao 北京晚報
Chenbao 晨報 "The Morning Post" (Beijing)
Da gongbao 大公報 (Tianjin)
Da hanbao 大漢報 (Hankou)
Da zhonghua zizhi gongbao 大中華自治公報 (Beijing)
Dongfang zazhi 東方雜誌 "Eastern Miscellany" (Shanghai)
Fengsheng 峰聲 (Beijing)
Gaizao 改造 (Beijing)
Guobao 國報 "The Nation" (Beijing)
Guomin xinbao 國民新報 "National Gazette" (Hankou)
Guomin zazhi 國民雜誌 "The Citizen" (Beijing)
Haichao yin 海潮音 (Hangzhou)
Hankou xinwenbao 漢口新聞報
Hankou zhongxibao 漢口中西報
Jichang ribao 吉長日報 (Changchun/Jilin)
Jingbao 京報 "The Peking Press" (Beijing)
Jinghua ribao 京話日報 (Beijing)
Jiuzai zhoukan 救災周刊 (Beijing)
Laifu bao 來複報 (Taiyuan)
Minguo ribao 民國日報 (Shanghai)
Minsheng yuekan 民生月刊 (Beijing)
Minyi ribao 民意日報 (Beijing)
Qingnian jinbu 青年進步"Association Progress," YMCA (Shanghai)
Qunbao 羣報 "Social Reports" (Beijing)
Shanbao 善報, of the Beijing Poor Children's Shelter (Beijing)
Shangye ribao 商業日報 (Beijing)
Shaonian shijie 少年世界 "The Journal of the Young China Association" (Shanghai)
Shenbao 申報 (Shanghai)
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Shichao 時潮 "The Tide" (Beijing?)
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Abbreviations

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Appendix

"Ministry of Communications Chart of Relief Transported Free-of-Charge
(交通部免費運賑憑照計數表)

Over the month of December 1920
(九年十二月份)"

As reported in *Zhengfu gongbao*, 13 June 1921.

Beijing Metropolitan Region (*jingzhao*)

Official organs

Agent	Grain & amount	Clothes & amount (or other material if otherwise specified)	Destination
Capital Soup Kitchen Provisioning Bureau 京畿粥廠籌備處	5,010 *shi*, 155,000 *jin*, 1,000 tons (total 2,636,600 *jin*)	-	Ten locations in the region, including Beijing city
Beifang difang fuwutuan 北方地方服務團	1,000 *shi* (total 160,000 *jin*)	-	Beijing
Navy Bureau 海軍部	-	20 tons	Beijing
Metropolitan Police 京師警察廳	-	1,000 sets	Beijing

Native extra-governmental agents (Metro)

Zhu Xisan 直魯豫代朱錫三	7,200 *shi* (1,152,000 *jin*)	-	None given (handled by the inspector general of Zhili, Shandong and Henan)
Buddhist Relief Society 佛教籌賑會	500 *shi* & 120 tons (total 281,600 *jin*)	-	Liulihe, Fangshan County
Chinese Red Cross 紅十字會	1,500 *shi* (total 240,000 *jin*)	5,700 items/sets	9 locations in the region
Tongqing Company 同慶公司 (京畿粥廠籌備處代)	1,000 *shi* (total 160,000 *jin*)	-	None given (handled by the Soup Kitchen Provisioning Bureau)
Nanyang Tobacco Company 南洋煙草公司 (天津華北華洋義振會代)	48,000 *jin*	-	Beijing (handled by the International Relief Society of Tianjin)
Tongji shantang (benevolence hall)	20 tons (33,600 *jin*)	-	Zhuo County (handled by the Metropolitan

同濟善堂 (京兆尹公署代)			Government)
Beijing Winter Clothing Relief Society of Hankou 漢口籌辦北京冬衣救濟會	-	5,000 items	Beijing
Capital Poor Relief Society 京師貧民救濟會	-	4,000 sets	Beijing
Beiwusheng relief society 北五省災區協濟會	-	3,550 items	Beijing
Beijing Relief Society of the Destitute 北京振濟極貧會	-	3,000 items	Beijing
Chinese Red Cross of Hankou 漢口紅十字會	-	2,440 items	None given
Shanghai Society for the Relief of Shandong, Hunan, Henan and Zhili 上海魯湘豫直義振會	-	1,000 items	Beijing
Shunzhi relief society 順直旱災救濟會	-	400 sets	Beijing

International societies (Metro)

Peking United International Famine Relief Committee 國際統一救災總會	-	200 sets	None specified

Zhili (Hebei)

Official organs

(Central) Government Relief Bureau 督辦振務處	9,966,836 *jin*	27,000 sets/items	7 rail depots in East and West Zhili
Zhili Provincial Government 直隸省署	1,040,000 *jin*	-	Dongguang, Shunde (Xingtai) and Potou
Army Bureau and the 8th Division 陸軍部 陸軍第八師	-	16,719 items	Tianjin and Baoding
Navy Bureau 海軍部 海軍總司令部	1,000 *shi* (160,000 *jin*)	5,749 items and 17 boxes	Dongguang, Cizhou, Botou
Henan Provincial Relief Bureau	-	2,030 bolts and 500 sets	Tianjin and Ci County

河南振務處			
Central Relief & *Pingtiao* Bureau 督辦振糶事宜處	-	850 sets	Lianggezhuang

County governments (Zhili)

Anxin County 安新縣公署	1,290,240 *jin*	Xushui County
Xingtai County Assembly 邢台縣自治會	530,000 *jin*	Xingtai County
Han Jingzhou for Neiqiu County 韓景周代内邱縣	161,280 *jin*	Neiqiu County
Tangshan County 唐山縣	96,768 *jin*	Neiqiu County
Handan County 邯鄲縣署	72,000 *jin*	Handan County
Lingshou County 靈壽縣公署	64,512 *jin*	Zhengding County
Zhang Qianguang for Zanhuang County 張謙光代贊皇縣	32,256 *jin*	Yuanshi County

Native extra-governmental agents (Zhili)

Buddhist Relief Society 佛教籌振會	23,463,460 *jin*	10,200 sets & 125,000 *jin*	Rail heads at Baoding, Qingfengdian, Dingzhou, Fangshunqiao, Wangdu, Shijiazhuang, Zhengding, Dongchangshou, Botou, and Jingxing
North China Relief Society 華北救災協會	4,999,680 *jin* (listed as clothes, this is presumably an error)	-	Shijiazhuang and Xingtai
Tianjin Emergency Relief Society 天津急振會	4,838,400 *jin*	-	Tianjin
Northern Provinces Emergency Relief Society 北省急振協會	3,393,331 *jin*	-	Gaoyi, Shijiazhuang, Botou, Lianzhen, Matouzhen, Tianjin, and Sangyuan
Emergency Relief Society of Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Guangdong, and Zhili Merchants 江浙粵直商界急振會	2,419,200 *jin*	-	Tianjin
Northern Work Relief Society of Shanghai 上海北方工振協會	2,067,762 *jin*	21,000 items	Ci County, Shijiazhuang, Handan

Shanghai Society for the Relief of Shandong, Hunan, Henan and Zhili 上海魯湘豫直**義振**會	1,612,800 *jin*	8,141 items	Cang County
Zhili Native-Place Association of Harbin 哈爾濱直隸同鄉會	870,912 *jin*	-	Cang County
Zhili Native-Place Association of Jilin 旅吉京直同鄉會 (吉林鮑督軍代)	483,840 *jin*	-	Tianjin (handled by the military governor of Jilin)
Chinese Red Cross of Hankou 漢口紅十字會	38,707 *jin*	-	Tianjin
Shunzhi Drought Relief Society 順直旱災救濟會	-	19,140 items	Botou, Lianzhen, Xingtai, Fangshunqiao, Baoding, Wangdu, and Handan
Relief Society of Zhili Sojourners in Ningbo, Zhejiang 旅寧直隸**義振**分會	-	12,946 items	Tianjin
Ji Prefecture Six-County Drought Disaster Relief Society 冀屬六縣旱災救濟會	-	7,260 items	Tianjin and Sangyuan
Winter Clothing Relief Society of the Northern Provinces 北省冬衣救濟會	-	7,000 items	Xingtai
North China Famine Relief Society of Hankou 漢口華北救災會	-	4,100 sets	Handan
Beijing Emergency Relief Society 北京急振協會	-	2,000 items	Gaoyi
Chinese Red Cross 中國紅十字會	-	29 sacks (*bao*) of clothes	Tianjin

International societies and missions (Zhili)

International Famine Relief Committee of Tianjin 天津華北華洋**義賑**會	11,800 *jin*	$360,266 silver, 27,635 *jin* of clothes & 12,154 items	Tianjin
Zhengding Catholic Church 正定天主總教堂	200 tons of grain (336,000 *jin*)	500 tons of coal	Zhengding
Peking United International Famine Relief Committee 國際統一救災總會	100 tons of grain (168,000 *jin*)	7,500 items/sets	7 rail depots in west Zhili

International Famine Relief Committee of Shanghai 上海華洋義振會	-	1,760 *jin* of clothes	Tianjin

Henan Province

Official organs

Henan Provincial Relief Bureau 河南振務處	15,050,304 *jin*	$20,000 silver, and 500 tons of coal	Luoyang, Xin'an, Mianchi, Anyang, Gong County, Guanyintang, Kaifeng, Wan County, Zhumadian, Yijingpu, Yanshi, Sishui
(Central) Government Relief Bureau 督辦振務處	2,399,846 *jin*	6,000 sets	Xinzheng, Yijingpu, Xinxiang, Daokou, Yanshi, Xin'an, and Mianchi, Zhengzhou

County governments (Henan)

Song County and County Government Relief Bureau 嵩縣公署 嵩縣籌振事務處 嵩縣籌振公所	10,192,896 *jin*	-	Luoyang
Jiyuan County Government 濟源縣公署	3,225,600 *jin*	-	Xuzhou, Kaifeng, Zhengzhou, Xinxiang, and Qinghua
Xinxiang County magistrate 新鄉縣知事	1,451,520 *jin*	-	Two districts in Xinxiang county
Luoyang County 洛陽縣	864,000 *jin*	8,000 *diao* of coppers	Luoyang
Huaxian County magistrate 滑綫知事	645,120 *jin*	-	Daokou
Ji County magistrate 汲縣知事	483,840 *jin*	-	Weihui

Native extra-governmental agents (Henan)

North China Famine Relief Society of Hankou 漢口華北救災會	2,400,000 *jin*	-	Anyang

Northern Provinces Emergency Relief Society 北省急振協會	1,612,800 *jin*	16,000 *diao* coppers and 600 sets	Zhengzhou, Huojia, and Fenglezhen
Ningbo County (Zhejiang) gentryman Lü Qingyuan 寧波縣紳呂清源	967,680 *jin*	-	Luoyang, Anyang
Shanghai Society for the Relief of Shandong, Hunan, Henan and Zhili 上海魯湘豫直**義振**會	768,000 *jin*	-	Tangyin
North China Relief Society 華北救災協會	130,637 *jin*	3,100 sets	Rongze, Fanshui, and Rongyang
Liuhegou Coal Mining Company 六河溝煤礦公司	-	8,000 sets	Fenglezhen
Yuan Shifu 袁世輔	-	4,000 items	Weihui
Henan Disaster Relief Society 河南旱災救濟會	-	2,000 sets	Zhengzhou
Shanghai's Renji benevolence hall 上海仁濟善堂	-	2,300 *jin* of clothing	Zhengzhou

International societies (Henan)

International Famine Relief Committee of Tianjin 天津華洋義賑會	25,750 *jin*	$50,000 silver, 24,530 items of clothing, and 9,873 *jin* of clothing	Kaifeng, Zhengzhou, Weihui
International Famine Relief Committee of Shanghai 上海華洋義振會	600,000 *jin*	-	Zhengzhou
Zhuyu International Relief Society 駐豫華洋義振會	-	27,472 *jin* of clothing	Unspecified

Shandong

Official organs

(Central) Government Relief Bureau 督辦賑務處	2,602,214 *jin* of grain	-	Dezhou
Cui Enqing 松滬護軍使 委員崔恩慶	1,612,800 *jin* of grain (reads clothes, presumably an error)	-	Jinan

Native extra-governmental agents (Shandong)

Shandong Famine Relief Committee 山東賑災公會	32,256,000 *jin*	-	Jinan, Luankou, Yucheng, Sangyuan (Zhili), Pingyuan, Dezhou
Shanghai Relief Society of Shandong, Hunan and Henan 上海 魯湘豫義賑會	19,353,600 *jin* (reads clothes, presumably an error)	-	Dezhou
Northern Provinces Emergency Relief Society 北省急振協會	7,041,485 *jin*	-	Jinan, Dezhou, Pingyuan
Northern Work Relief Society of Shanghai 上海北方工賑協會	1,000,000 *jin*	-	Dezhou
Jinan County 濟南縣	145,152 *jin*	-	Sangzidian
Ji Prefecture Six-County Drought Disaster Relief Society 冀屬六縣旱災救濟會	-	3,330 items	Dezhou
Shandong military government on behalf of Yuan Shiyuan 徐士元 (山東督軍署代)	-	2,000 sets	Pingyuan

International societies and missions (Shandong)

American Red Cross 美國紅十字會	4,098,720 *jin*	-	Dezhou and Huangheya
Pastor from the London Missionary Society 倫敦教會牧師	1,128,960 *jin*	-	Dezhou
British-American Tobacco Company, Tianjin 天津英美煙公司	32,256 *jin*	-	Dezhou
International Famine Relief Committee of Tianjin 天津華洋義賑會	-	$15,000 silver	Jinan

Shanxi

Official organs

Shanxi Provincial Relief Bureau 山西全省賑務處	2,000,000 *jin*	-	Yangquan and Taiyuan
Central Relief & *Pingtiao* Bureau 辦畿輔賑糶事宜處	64,512 *jin*	-	Shanshifeng and Hengkou

Native extra-governmental agents (Shanxi)

Shanxi Disaster Relief Society 山西旱災救濟會	3,859,200 *jin*	-	Yangquan, Yuci, Taiyuan
Pingding County relief societies 平定縣救濟友愛各會	1,608,000 *jin*	-	Yanhui and Yangquan
Buddhist Relief Society 佛教籌賑會	1,120,000 *jin*	-	Pingding
Beiwusheng relief society 北五省災區協濟會	-	1,000 sets	Yangquan

International societies and missions (Shanxi)

Christian Church of Ding County (Zhili) 定縣基督教會	405,000 *jin*	-	Yanhui
International Famine Relief Committee of Tianjin 天津華洋義賑會	-	$5,000 silver	Taiyuan
Peking United International Famine Relief Committee 國際統一救濟總會	-	400 items	Anping

Note: no data on Shaanxi is provided by this source.