
DIALOGUE IN ACTION: CHINA AND THE RED CROSS MOVEMENT

行动中的对话：
中国和红十字运动

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Kindly note that I am an ordinary member of the Australian Red Cross Society. I do not hold any office in the Society. The views expressed here are my own, and without reference to any organisational or personal views.

ABSTRACT

The essay explores the prospects for Dialogue with China, by surveying the history of the Red Cross Movement in China through the four periods of its modern history. The author adopts the four propositions for dialogue outlined by Xi Jinping, and then, in light of the Red Cross history, proposes two other propositions, to assist dialogues when challenges and difficulties are encountered along the way. This sketch of the Red Cross Movement in China demonstrates the importance of patience and reciprocity for sustaining any cross-cultural dialogue.

FRAMING A DIALOGUE

In May 2019, China's leader Xi Jinping spoke at the Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations. He gave four propositions for dialogue:

First, mutual respect and equal treatment.

Second, adhere to beauty.

Third, adhere to openness, inclusiveness, and mutual learning.

Fourth, keep pace with the times and innovate and develop. (Xi, 2019)

These elements for a dialogue are very useful, but it seems to me that we can usefully add two more:

Fifth, allow the dialogue to influence and change one's own position.

Sixth, develop mechanisms for times when dialogue fails.

The fifth point for dialogue is crucial, if we are to avoid the pretence of dialogues that are only monologues about one's own position. We can call these monologues "dialogues of the deaf" when there is no possibility of change. The sixth point for dialogue is also crucial, because the failure of dialogues is inevitable. Misunderstandings, mistranslations, and misadventures can all occur, even when goodwill is present.

THE DIALOGUE PARTNERS: THE RED CROSS MOVEMENT

I have chosen to depict one partner in the dialogue as the Red Cross Movement. This is to avoid tying the dialogue too closely to some of the institutions within the Red Cross Movement. I want to speak of the progress of a Movement, as an ideal, which spread throughout the world. I do not want to comment on various institutions such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and the many national societies which bear the name of the Red Cross, including the current Red Cross Society of China.

The Red Cross Movement, as an ideal, begins with the bloody Battle of Solferino in 1859. The failure of the armies to care for their wounded horrified a Swiss banker, Henry Dunant. Dunant wrote a powerful book, *A Memory of Solferino*, which recommended the organisation of voluntary societies who would help the wounded irrespective of their nationality, and an international agreement to protect the volunteers. (Dunant, 1986) This book launched a humanitarian project which later became institutionalised in various Red Cross structures.

[A] major promoter of the Movement has been the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the ICRC has worked to facilitate the response from China. This has included extensive promotion of international humanitarian law (IHL) through the China Red Cross Society, and within the Chinese armed forces. Universities have also been involved in the promotion of international humanitarian law, and several universities have research centres on IHL.

The Movement has evolved since 1859, adopting a variety of forms and spreading globally. A key stage, led by Swiss general Guillaume Henri Dufour, was the signing of the first *Geneva Convention* in 1864. (O'Brien, 2017) Over the years, the Red Cross has developed a set of principles, summarised as Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary Service, Unity, and Universality. (ICRC, 2016)

THE DIALOGUE PARTNERS: CHINA

Readers of the *Macau Ricci Institute Journal* (MRIJ) need no introduction to China! But it might be good to note one detail. The dialogue has been sustained for more than a century, through very different periods in China's modern history. Dr Wei Bingling, a postdoctoral fellow at Tsinghua University, has suggested a four-part division for this dialogue: China in the late Imperial period, in the Republican period, in the Maoist period, and in the post-Mao period. (Wei, 2020)

In the last years of the Imperial regime, the traditional method for public assistance was through local gentry. But several factors combined to make the message of the Red Cross Movement attractive. One factor was the number of Chinese who had encountered Red Cross activities in Europe or in Japan. (Li, 2016). Another was the presence of foreigners, including merchants and missionaries, who had experience of the Red Cross. And the third was the operation of the Japan Red Cross during the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), when Red Cross personnel treated the wounded on both sides. (Wei, 2020, 94) During the First Sino-Japanese War, foreign medical and missionary personnel, sometimes with local participants, had established informal Red Cross Hospitals, suggesting that the principles

of the Movement, though not the organisational structures, already had some acceptance in China. That four different dates are proposed for the establishment of the Red Cross Society of China suggests that the diffusion of the principles of the Movement, however understood, preceded formal establishment.

THE AGENTS OF DIALOGUE: SHEN DUNHE

It is beyond the scope of this presentation to identify every contributor to the establishment of the Movement in China. But a forest is made up of many individual trees. So, I would like to identify one Chinese and one foreigner simply as examples of agents of dialogue.

My first example is Shen Dunhe. Recently, Sun Shuopeng, vice-president of the Chinese Red Cross Society said of Shen:

“Undoubtedly, the first memorable person is Shen Dunhe, the founding father of China's Red Cross movements. Judging from his photo, he looks like an old man. In fact, he had lived for 55 years only. He was a returned student from Cambridge University, an official taking charge of forte dispatches during the First Sino-Japanese War, a specialist in international laws, and a minister for foreign affairs. With so many titles, Shen Dunhe experienced so many vicissitudes in his life and seemed older than his real age. He was only 39 when he founded Shanghai Branch of the Cosmopolitan Red Cross Society in 1904. At that time, he was in a blooming period of his life; however, his country was in a state of devastation.” (Sun, 2012)

Some of the key people in dialogue with China are those Chinese who have studied abroad and engaged with ideas and movements which they

brought back to China. Shen Dunhe is one of those. Shen and others founded in Shanghai the Cosmopolitan Red Cross Society, perhaps named because of the participation of many foreign nationals. It later became the Great Qing Red Cross Society and later still the China Red Cross Society. Shen is noted for the foundation of hospitals, including epidemic hospitals. (Peng, 2022)

Jacquinet was a vice-president of the Shanghai International Committee of the Red Cross of China, and head of its Refugee Committee. The Committee members wore the Red Cross emblem for their work. The boundaries of the “safe zones” were marked by Red Cross flags. (Ristaino, 2008) Although the question of safe zones may have been discussed at the Fifteenth International Conference of the Red

On the China side, there has been continuous learning about the works of the Movement, particularly in the protection of victims of war and the related health care activities during peace time. Early Chinese views about the maintenance of Red Cross activities during peace time joined with similar views from other countries to change the focus of Red Cross activities so that it included peace-time relief work.

THE AGENTS OF DIALOGUE:
ROBERT JACQUINOT DE BESANGE

In 2017, a plaque to honour Jesuit missionary Robert Jacquinet de Besange was erected in Shanghai. (Yi, 2017) In 1937, Jacquinet, with an established reputation in relief work, led a group to establish a “safe zone” which sheltered at least 300,000 Chinese civilians during suburban fighting in Shanghai. Jacquinet led the negotiations with Chinese and Japanese authorities to establish the Nanshi Refugee Zone. It was in the Old City of Shanghai, adjacent to the French Concession. The zone was respected by the warring parties and administered by an international committee. (An interesting aspect of diversity is that Jacquinet’s assistant Pan Da was a member of the Communist underground in Shanghai.) (Anon, 2015)

Cross in Tokyo in 1934, there was no direct treaty law for the protection of civilians. It was simply the initiative of Jacquinet and his colleagues that was so effective. Jacquinet, not constrained by questions of treaty law, was motivated by the principles of the Red Cross Movement. His safe zone was a model for further zones in China. The International Committee for the Nanking Safety Zone was established on the same principle as the Committee in Shanghai and sheltered around 250,000 civilians.

These two agents of dialogue, Shen Dunhe and Robert Jacquinet de Besange, can serve as representatives of the many individuals who brought the spirit of the Movement to China. They found in China that the spirit of humanity (人道) forged a ready link with the spirit of benevolence from the Confucian tradition (仁道). (Li, 2022)

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR
MUTUAL LEARNING:
INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

We can briefly introduce the connection between the Red Cross in the People's Republic of China and international humanitarian law (IHL). The initial proposals by Henri Dunant had two elements: the formation in times of peace of volunteer groups who could assist war wounded, and an international agreement which would protect the wounded and the volunteers from attack. In a brief way, we can say that the second element, the international agreement, provides the basis for modern international humanitarian law. Participation in these treaties began with the Qing dynasty, in 1904 and 1906, continued with accessions to the 1929 Conventions by the Republic of China, and further by the People's Republic of China. The People's Republic of China has acceded to the 1949 Conventions and Additional Protocols. (Wang, 2013)

Since that time, a major promoter of the Movement has been the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the ICRC has worked to facilitate the response from China. This has included extensive promotion of international humanitarian law (IHL) through the China Red Cross Society, and within the Chinese armed forces. Universities have also been involved in the promotion of international humanitarian law, and several universities have research centres on IHL. The Chinese National IHL Committee, an inter-ministerial body, was established in 2007 to better coordinate and promote the domestic implementation of IHL. (Zhang, 2017)

This participation has been two-way. Chinese judges have served on international criminal tribunals applying international humanitarian law. Chinese have become teachers in global institutes such as the San Remo Institute

of International Humanitarian Law (Senior Colonel He Xiaodong has been at that institute for many years). Chinese and non-Chinese scholars have been exploring the parallels between Chinese ancient and contemporary philosophies and the spirit of the Red Cross Movement.

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR INNOVATION:
THE INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY OF THE
RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT
AT SOOCHOW UNIVERSITY, SUZHOU

In 2019, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) came to an agreement with Soochow University in Suzhou, Jiangsu Province, to host an Academy. The IFRC had established a Solferino Academy a few years earlier, but the Academy in Suzhou seems to be the first in a partnership with a local university. Wan Lijun, speaking at the establishment of the Academy, provided an interesting contribution to dialogue: "The carry-out of Red Cross spiritual education and fundamental task of morality and nurturing should be combined together. The education on core socialist values and Red Cross spiritual education should be combined." (Anon, 2019) This could provide an innovative opportunity for dialogue involving the principles of the Red Cross Movement, and contemporary Chinese socialist principles.

ASSESSING THE DIALOGUE

I will follow the pointers which I have given at the beginning.

First, mutual respect and equal treatment. It is difficult to treat two different entities on an equal basis. A nation on the one hand is not equivalent to a movement on the other. But certainly, China has grown in its respect for the Movement and its aims and has sought to

participate in the structures and activities which have grown from the movement. I expect the dialogue to continue.

Second, adhere to beauty. I will take this in its widest sense. Humanitarian spirit and benevolence are beautiful dimensions of human life.

Third, adhere to openness, inclusiveness, and mutual learning. On the China side, there has been continuous learning about the works of the Movement, particularly in the protection of victims of war and the related health care activities during peace time. Early Chinese views about the maintenance of Red Cross activities during peace time joined with similar views from other countries to change the focus of Red Cross activities so that it included peace-time relief work. And China began to reach outwards: the first step was in 1923, when during the Japan earthquake in 1923, the then president Dr. New led a China Red Cross medical team to aid Japan. It was China's first overseas medical aid. (Qiao, 2020)

Nevertheless, two key principles of the Red Cross movement have been independence and voluntary service. At each stage – the imperial period, the Republican period, the Mao period, and the post-Mao period – there have been pressures from national leadership to keep the Red Cross dependent on government, or at least tightly controlled. There are times when the China Red Cross has resembled a government department.

Fourth, keep pace with the times and innovate and develop. The dialogue with the Red Cross movement has been an element in China's modernization project, a project which is ongoing. The dialogue has been carried by China's own people, and by foreigners from Japan and Western countries. The story has included Red Cross Hospitals, epidemic and

pandemic protection, and international law. The International Academy of Red Cross and Red Crescent is a recent innovation and is already running courses for young people in China.

Fifth, allow the dialogue to influence and change one's own position. Learning by the Red Cross movement has included a sensitivity to China's political and social systems. Also, the Red Cross has set out to discover elements in China's culture which could resonate with the movement. For China, the changes have included changes to the legal system, incorporating training methods such as mootings for law students, and the adoption of western medical and nursing practices.

Sixth, develop mechanisms for times when dialogue fails. This is difficult to specify, when one party to the dialogue is a nation-state, while the other is a diffuse movement within civil society involving institutional participants. But there are some indicators: one is the survival of the Red Cross movement in China, by contrast with the local Red Swastika movement, which was proscribed by the post-1949 authorities. (Pfeiff, 2016) Dialogue has been maintained, even during the very difficult period of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, when the branch structure of the Red Cross Society of China collapsed, and the organisation almost disappeared. (Wei, 2020) Successful mechanisms for renewing dialogue may include patience, and a clear perception of the non-negotiable positions of either party.

CONCLUSION

One conclusion, based on a review of this dialogue over more than a century, is that participants in a dialogue must be prepared to take a long view of the relationship, and accept temporary setbacks or delays. Patience is a key virtue, especially when combined with respect.

Our brief sketch of the dialogue between the Red Cross movement and China gives us a chance to observe two quite different actors. Also, in the period of our observation, both China and the Red Cross have undergone many and important changes. The dialogue continues, and no doubt there will be changes in the future. Both China and the Red Cross Movement have much to contribute to each other.



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