

## Private Charities and the Public Good – Institutional Memory of Plague Prevention in Manchuria

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When we last met in Penang, I presented a paper that examined a charity called the Red Swastika Society as it moved from Shandong to Manchuria, tracing its changing relationship with various actors, and the Japanese-backed government of Manchukuo in particular. Noting the creation of state-backed charitable societies in Manchukuo, I theorized that organizations such as the Red Swastika Society might have been slated for a planned obsolescence motivated primarily by a growing animosity towards civil society initiatives.

As it turns out, I was missing a very important piece of the puzzle. Although private charities did emerge from a growing attention to public good, their operation could also trespass into the legitimate exercise of state authority. One area of charitable activity—epidemic prevention—was unquestionably an area of official concern. This was particularly true in Manchuria, which not only weathered three major epidemics in as many decades, but was also covered by overlapping areas of Chinese, Russian and Japanese jurisdiction. Much has been written on the response of individual governments to Manchuria's plagues, but epidemic prevention was also an international affair, owing both to the need to pool resources and technical expertise, and to the fact that pathogens tend not to carry passports.

Keeping in mind the question of why the government of Manchukuo developed an ambivalent stance towards private charities in its midst, I would like to look at the charities themselves (both mission, and groups such as the Chinese Red Cross) to see how the experience of epidemic prevention in Manchuria might have changed their perception of and relationship with state power.

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