The "non-religious" red cross emblem and Japan

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The problem of the red cross emblem is one which, given the continuing antagonisms between religions and ethnic groups since the end of the Cold War, ought to be resolved as soon as possible.[1] This problem arose during the Russo-Turkish war of 1876-77 when Turkey gave up the use of the red cross emblem and opted instead to use a red crescent on a white ground.

That the red cross emblem might be construed as having some religious significance was certainly contrary to what the founders of the Red Cross movement or the States party to the original Geneva Convention of 1864 had wished. However, the way Europeans viewed the application of international law in the mid-nineteenth century was greatly influenced by the division between the "Christian world" and the "non-Christian world", and the perception of that division was in those days inextricably linked to the concept of "civilized nations".[2] Thus the accession to the Red Cross Convention by the Ottoman Empire, an entity whose origins were non-Christian and non-European, as well as the departure from uniformity that resulted from use of the different emblem, became an occasion for the West to develop new ideas on the application of international law. Indeed, the Red Cross Convention was meant to encompass as many nations as possible and to maintain certain universal standards.

Despite being a non-Christian nation, Japan did not, as did Turkey and Persia, choose to adopt a new emblem to indicate its membership of the international Red Cross movement. And unlike Siam (now Thailand), it did not aspire to international recognition of a protective emblem combining the red cross with some other national symbol that did have an undeniable religious

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connotation. Japan took a clear public stance against any interpretation of the red cross emblem as having any religious character, and until 1929 supported the idea that there should be a uniform international emblem.

There was nevertheless a certain incongruity in the myth, which developed in response to Turkey's adoption of the red crescent emblem, that the cross as an emblem had never had any religious links and the myth that it was completely devoid of any religious connotation in non-Christian Japan.[3]

Early interpretation: 1860s to 1910s

The "non-religious" Japanese Red Cross

The political leaders of Japan's Meiji period (1868-1912) were quite sensitive to any suspicion that the concept of "international law" might be seen as having a semantic bias toward "legal provisions among countries of the Christian religion" or that "countries of another religion were beyond its pale".[4] For Japan, which so fervently wanted to improve its perceived status from that of an "uncivilized country" to that of a "civilized nation", member-

1 Kokusai Jind¯oh¯o Senmonka Kaigi, *Kokusai jind¯oh¯o to wagakuni no kadai - h¯okokusho*. Nihon Sekij¯ujisha, Tokyo, 1997, pp. 3-4, 54. The principal publications concerning the Red Cross emblem are the following: François Bugnion, *The Emblem of the Red Cross: A Brief History*, ICRC, Geneva, 1977; "The red cross and red crescent emblem", *International Review of the Red Cross*, No. 272, September-October 1989, pp. 408-419; *Towards a Comprehensive Solution to the Question of the Emblem*, ICRC, Geneva, August 2000 (translation of an article in French originally published in *International Review of the Red Cross*, No. 338, June 2000); Antoine Bouvier, "Special aspects of the use of the red cross or red crescent emblem", *International Review of the Red Cross*, No. 272, September-October 1989, pp. 438-458; "Unity and plurality of the emblems", *International Review of the Red Cross*, No. 289, July-August 1992, pp. 333-338.

2 Yanaihara Masaharu, "Kindai kokusaih¯o riron ni okeru kokka," in Rekishi to H¯oh¯o Hensh¯u Iinkai (ed.), *Rekishi to h¯oh¯o 4 – teikoku to kokumin kokka*, Aoki Shoten, Tokyo, September 2000, pp. 59-78.

3 See also N. Margaret Kosuge, "Religion, the Red Cross and the Japanese treatment of POWs", in Philip Towle, N. Margaret Kosuge and Yoichi Kibata (eds), *Japanese Prisoners of War*, Humbledon and London, London, 2000, pp. 149-162.

4 Thomas Erskine Holland, "Nisshin sens¯o ni okeru kokusaih¯o," in *Mutsu Munemitsu kankei bunsho*, Kokusai Toshokan Kensei Shiry¯okan, items 78-79; Fujimura Michio, "Nisshin sens¯o," in *Iwanami k¯oza: Nihon rekishi* 16 (*kindai* 3), 1976, Iwanami Shoten, Tokyo, pp. 2-3, 41. For a discussion of the question of the separability or non-separability of Meiji Japanese religion and civilization, see Yamaguchi Teruomi, *Meiji kokka to sh¯uky¯o*, Tokyo University Press, Tokyo, 1999, pp. 66-107, 329-350. On perceptions of the Red Cross Convention in modern Japan, see Umetani Noboru, "Nihon to senji kokusai j¯oki – Meiji to Sh¯owa no rakusa," in Seiji Keizaishi Gakkai (ed.), *Nihon seiji keizaishigaku*, No. 343, January 1995, pp. 1-15; Kita Yoshito, "Nihongun no kokusai ninshiki to horyono toriatukai," in Hirama Y¯oichi *et al* (eds), *Nichiei k¯ory¯ushi, 1600-2000*,: Gunji, Vol. 3, Tokyo University Press, Tokyo, 2001, pp. 276-303; Fujita Hisakazu, "POWs and international law", Towle, Kosuge and Kibata, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp. 87-102; "Sens¯o h¯o kara jind¯o h¯o he-senkanki nihon no 'jikko'", in Nihon h¯ogakkai (ed.), *Nihon to kokusaih¯o no hyakunen*, Vol. 3 (*anzenhosh¯o*), Sanseido,

ship of the Red Cross Convention of 1864 was an important step toward entering a specially privileged and often exclusively inclined circle of countries of Christian and European origin. So even though there was initially a tendency among some Japanese to regard the red cross with disfavour as a possible symbol of Christianity, once Japan formally committed itself to the Red Cross Convention on 15 November 1886, the red cross emblem generally came to be accepted with enthusiasm.

In 1906, at the Diplomatic Conference held in Geneva to revise the 1864 Convention, the delegates from China, Siam and Persia each expressed the opinion that although they could not deny attributing a certain religious character to the sign of the cross, it was nonetheless possible to pay respect to it "for historical considerations". Japan, on the other hand, while supporting a unified emblem, made clear its own view that the cross emblem had no religious significance.[5]

It was not until 1929, at the Geneva Diplomatic Conference to further revise the Red Cross Convention and to draft a convention on the treatment of prisoners of war (POWs), that Japan expressed its willingness to see a plurality of emblems associated with the international Red Cross movement.[6]

However, all this did not necessarily mean that Japan itself had fully accepted the red cross emblem as having the "non-religious" character attributed to it by the Western European members and the International Committee of the Red Cross. As a backdrop to the Red Cross movement's rapid development in Japan, the special "support and protection" given to the Japanese Red Cross Society (JRCS) by the Imperial Family must not be overlooked.[7] It has been pointed out that the JRCS was originally apprehensive of meeting with antagonism not only from anti-Christian ideologists but from the Japanese people in general, and that this may have given rise to a particular need to advertise the "support and protection" accorded to it by the Imperial Family and to emphasize that its activities were "unrelated to Christianity".[8]

Tokyo, 2001, pp.143-165.

5 Bugnion, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp. 20-25. See also the journal *Nihon Sekij¯uji*, January 1907, p. 26.

6 At this conference Japan, France, Italy and the Netherlands expressed approval of the adoption by Turkey and Persia of the "red crescent" and "red lion and sun" emblems respectively. This subject had previously been deferred. The only countries which voted on maintaining a single emblem were Rumania and Chile. See Bugnion, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp. 29-36.

7 See Olive Checkland, *Humanitarianism and the Emperor's Japan, 1877-1977*, St Martin's Press, London, 1994.

8 Kameyama Michiko, *Kindai Nihon kangoshi* Vol I: *Nihon Sekijūjisha to kangofu*, Domesu Shuppan,

What I should like to consider here is the question of how, if the Red Cross in Japan was to enjoy the support and protection of the Imperial Family, it could truly be expected to remain free from any religious tinge.

Just a year after the JRCS was founded, the conservative ideologist Sugiura J¯ugō published his influential book *Haiyaron* (The Argument for Excluding Christianity) whose views were centred on the concept of the "Imperial House". According to Sugiura, any religious movement in Japan could successfully develop and exert influence only with support emanating from the Imperial Family.[9] He theorized that Christianity would not spread in Japan as long as it was not adopted by the Imperial Family, and at the same time he expressed his doubts about "the Christian brand of humanitarianism".

It was in this sort of anti-Christian environment that Japan's own peculiar "myth" about the non-religious character of the red cross emblem took root. For example, a history of the development of the JRCS published in 1915 dealt with differences between the Japanese Red Cross Society and European and American Red Cross Societies by explaining, first of all, that possible interpretations of the significance of the red cross may differ somewhat, depending on the country in question: Japan's Red Cross Society had its origin in the concepts of "loyalty to the sovereign and patriotism" and was meant first and foremost as a "vehicle for serving the nation and giving succour to its soldiers", whereas in the West, the significance of the red cross stemmed from religious concepts primarily focused on "humanitarianism" and "charity." It went on to say that even in the countries of Europe and America, the Red Cross Societies nonetheless also made "service to the nation" one of their main objectives, so it was only in a formal sense that "humanitarianism" might be put in first place, before the rest of the world. Secondly, it explained that the Geneva Convention was wholly unrelated to questions of religion, and that consequently the red cross emblem had nothing to do with the crucifix of Christianity; it furthermore pointed out that the non-Christian Ottoman Empire was party to the Convention and was carrying out various types of affiliated voluntary relief activities. The Red Cross had, it conceded, indeed developed from the concepts of "benevolence" and "morality", but since these concepts in Western countries were

Tokyo, 1983, pp. 38-39; see also Nihon Sekij¯ujisha, *Nihon Sekij¯ujisha shashi k¯o*, Tokyo, 1911, p. 154.

9 Okita K¯oji, "Sugiura J¯ug¯o no 'rigaku' shis¯o to haiyaron," in Doshisha University Humanities Research Center (ed.), *Haiyaron no kenky¯u*, Ky¯obunkan, Kyoto, 1989, pp. 223-239. Sugiura J¯ug¯o, "Kat¯o Hiroyuki

difficult to separate from religion, it was natural enough to recognize that the Red Cross organizations there were not wholly unrelated to Christianity.[10]

For Japan the red cross emblem was seen as encompassing both Japanese "traditions" and those of others, albeit responding to a Euro-centric internationalism, thus as becoming a symbol, in a way that could in fact be most appropriately pursued by a nation of non-European religious tradition like Japan, of transcendental and "truly universal" values. Therefore Japan did not adopt a new emblem of its own to denote Red Cross membership, nor did it promote international recognition of an emblem superimposing on the red cross a national symbol designating a religion. Internally the JRCS, when established in 1887, only adopted a Society crest for its own use, consisting of a red cross embraced by a phoenix with paulownia and bamboo. This design was taken from a carving showing Empress Sh¯oken's ornamental hairpin handed down to the Imperial House since the ancient period.[11]

The red cross as a national symbol

If Turkey had decided to adopt the red crescent emblem because it perceived the red cross as having a Christian connotation, Japan, while recognizing the Christian link to it, nevertheless accepted the red cross emblem, combined it with its own "traditions" and then used it to help create a "new tradition" for which the emblem came to be a sort of national symbol. Indeed, for Japan the red cross took on a new significance as the expression of that new tradition, created by bringing together both international elements and elements that were "national" or at least considered appropriate to become so.

The Red Cross organization in Japan thus played a special role in bringing the people together to think of themselves as a national unit. For example, in comparison with many European countries, Japan's citizen-army foundation for a modern military establishment was at one time noticeably much weaker and slower to develop. Promulgation of the Revised Military Conscription Law of 1889 was therefore consciously linked to plans for promoting a sort of interdependence between the social structure in individual localities and the structure intended for the military establishment. In this way it became a vehicle for promoting the "militarization" of modern Japanese

kun no tokuikuron," quoted in Okita, *ibid*., pp.223-224.

10 Kawamata Seiichi, *Nihon Sekij¯ujisha hattatsushi,* Meibunsha, Tokyo, 1915, p. 6.

society as a whole, making use of a series of educational policies and new methods for organizing society at the local level.[12] The Japanese Red Cross had been established only about two years before this revision of the Conscription Law. The latter's effect was that from the late nineteenth century and into the early years of the twentieth century, the trend towards militarization of local society became all the more pronounced through the formation of various types of local organizations to assist military endeavours. It was precisely during this period that the network of JRCS branches was being steadily built up at the local level.

Among Japan's various military-support groups, we might ask which roles were played most prominently by the Red Cross Society. The most important point about the role of the JRCS was made in a book on the role of international law in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, published by the well-known legal expert Ariga Nagao in 1896. According to Ariga, the JRCS was "an organization of the whole of the Japanese people, rather than private groups operated by individual persons with a civic or patriotic interest (...) a single entity, under public management and encompassing the whole nation, who from the sovereign above to his subjects below share a common purpose as well as common rights and capabilities".[13] The Japanese legal expert explained that "in Japan the Red Cross Society is a single unified body dedicated to the nation as a whole; this situation differs from that in other countries where, in addition to the Red Cross Society, there may be many other societies of a religious nature or run by persons of noble rank which have similar charitable objectives". It was also pointed out that the JRCS, without regard for distinctions of class or social status, "is a major force for bringing together and harmonizing the Japanese people" and that this is accomplished through the "venerable prestige of the Imperial Family".[14]

Let us give special attention to Ariga's assertion that the JRCS — with the support of a special role to be played by the "venerable prestige of the Imperial Family" — was expected to become a self-propagating "force for bringing together and harmonizing the Japanese people" regardless of class or

11 See Kosuge, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp. 151-152.

12 Yoshida Yutaka, "Kokumin kaihei' no rinen to ch¯oheisei," in Yui Masaomi, Fujiwara Akira and Yoshida Yutaka, (eds), *Nihon kindai shis¯o taikei*, Vol. 4: *guntai, heishi*, Iwanami Shoten, Tokyo, 1989, pp. 473-477.

13 Ariga Nagao, *Nisshin sen'eki kokusaih¯oron*, Rikugun Daigakkō, Tokyo, August 1896, pp. 169-172.

social status. One way of measuring the spread and degree of social penetration of a country's Red Cross organization is of course to look at statistics on the number of formal Red Cross Society members. At the end of the nineteenth century, a very effective role in increasing the number of JRCS members, especially among women, was played by the nationwide tours made for that purpose by the Society's President, Prince Komatsu.[15] It should also be noted that approximately 41,000 members gathered in Tokyo's Hibiya Park in June 1908 for the 16th National Convention of the JRCS, at which the Society's then President, Prince Kan'in, greeted a delegation headed by Empress Shōken to the instrumental accompaniment of the *Kimigayo* national anthem.[16] At the 17th National Convention held two years later, the Empress was similarly greeted in the same park by a capacity crowd of Society members repeatedly shouting "*banzai*" (which literally means "may you prosper for ten thousand years") and singing the anthem.[17] Later reports of various gatherings, dating from the end of the Taishō period (1912-1925) and the beginning of the Shōwa period (1925-1988), likewise tell of tens of thousands of people "gathered in a single place under the silent and direct gaze of a member of the Imperial Family, waving the red and white national flag, making deep bows, singing the anthem, and giving *banzai* cheers."[18] In the context of those times, the National Conventions of the JRCS members must be thought to have been very noteworthy laudatory and commemorative events.

For Japan's political and military leaders desirous of "entering into Europe", the Red Cross was undoubtedly a unique and most important entity. Simultaneously international and national, it was capable, in what must have been considered an ideal manner, of imbuing the people with a sense of non-discriminatory oneness between the Emperor and his subjects and between the Emperor and his soldiers. In that same context it was also a means of encouraging the people to feel veneration and loyalty for their "traditional" sovereign with his ascribed benevolence — however much he might in fact be a popular cult figure with a "tradition" of only very recent date.

14 *Ibid*., pp. 171-172.

15 Letter from the JRCS Yamanashi Branch President, Count Kiyozumi Ienori, to Tanabe Yūei, dated 15 February 1898, in *Tanabe Aritsune-ke bunsho*, Archives of Enzan City Educational Committee.

16 Kawamata, *op. cit*. (note 10), p. 429.

17 *Ibid*., pp. 439-440.

The Japanese Red Cross and alleviating the effects of war

If it is true that every country's Red Cross or Red Crescent Society was originally founded as a publicly recognized auxiliary to the medical services of that country's armed forces, then in performing the international and universal task of trying to alleviate the unnecessary suffering of any human being, regardless of nationality, that same Red Cross Society also became an organization that had to respond to "national" and "patriotic" desires and demands.[19] In this respect, it should be mentioned that in Western societies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, what was most instrumental in rendering warfare more "humane" was a certain vigilance and supervision by the democratized society itself.

Underlying this move towards greater humanity in the conduct of war was a growing social awareness of the pain and death suffered on the battlefield by individuals.[20] The concern of society for the suffering of individuals entrusting their lives to nation-States was accentuated by a dramatic reduction, aided by advances in mass communications, of the "qualitative distance" between combat zones and areas away from the scene of battle. There emerged the desire among ordinary people to provide practical "wartime assistance" that might prevent the useless and unreasonable death and suffering of relatives, friends and neighbours who had gone to the battlefields to fight for their country and its people. It should be borne in mind, however, that this kind of activity to render the battle field more humane may have been seen by national governments and war leaders as a way of stabilizing the people's morale while continuing to pursue war aims.

In Japan, the red cross emblem became a symbol both of international and universal values that could be implemented only in their own Emperor-ruled, non-Christian country, and of the "love and care" that was supposedly bestowed upon soldiers and sailors by their Emperor. On the other hand, the founding of *Hakuaisha*, the forerunner of the JRCS established in 1877 in the Great Satsuma Rebellion, gives little or no hint of the kind of "national"

18 Hara Takeshi, "Reiraku' to shite no Hinomaru, Kimigayo", *Sekai*, February 2000, pp. 109-119.

19 See Adolf Picte, transl. Inoue Masatar¯o, *Sekij¯uji no shokisoku* (The Principles of the Red Cross), Japanese Red Cross Society, Tokyo, 1958, pp. 126-128.

20 On the growing sensitivity to war deaths and suffering in Western society, and especially in Great Britain, from the Crimean War to the First World War, see N. Margaret Kosuge, "Senshitai no hakken — jind¯oshugi to aikokushugi o h¯oy¯o saseta shintai," in Suzuki Akihito, and Ishizuka Hisao (eds), *Shintai ibunkaron — kankaku to yokub¯o*, Keio University Press, Tokyo, 2002, pp. 349-384.

protest against the abandonment of wounded soldiers on the battlefield that is perceptible to a greater or lesser extent in the founding of the Red Cross Societies, or of their predecessors, in Western countries.[21]

The consciousness of being observed by the West, rather than any move on the part of the families or neighbours of those sent into battle, may in fact be said to have caused Japan to come to grips with the tasks of rendering war more humane. Judgments as to how far these tasks were being effectively addressed were likewise largely made by Western observers.

Devaluating the Geneva Conventions: 1930s - early 1940s

Humanitarianism and the war effort

It has been pointed out that it was largely not until the early 1930s that Japan came to attribute less importance to the international law of war and to international treaties in general.[22] Japan had treated its enemy POWs leniently during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 and then in the First World War.[23] However, the attitude of the Japanese Army towards POWs was gradually changing, particularly since the end of the First World War, as it thought that the treatment of enemy POWs had been unduly lenient when compared to that of its own soldiers and that the latter would eventually be demoralized thereby. During the 1929 Diplomatic Conference in Geneva, the delegates from Japan therefore even insisted at the Committee II sessions on the treatment of POWs that the draft treaty on the treatment of POWs seemed to be "too lenient" vis-à-vis enemy captives and suggested that Committee members should revise the draft "properly"; such Japanese amendments were, however, finally dismissed.[24]

In November 1933, not long before the International Conference of the Red Cross was hosted in Tokyo the following year, Ninagawa Arata, who was then a member of the JRCS Steering Committee, lamented that "there

21 Picte, *op. cit.* (note 19), p. 130.

22 On the background to the changes in perceptions of wartime international law that came about in Japan during the 1930s, see Kanda Fuhito, "Kindai Nihon no sens¯o — horyo seisaku o ch¯ushin to shite", in the quarterly journal *Kikan Sens¯o Sekinin Kenky¯u*, No. 9, autumn 1995, pp. 10-17.

23 On Japanese lenient treatment of enemy POWs during the wars, see Philip Towle, "Introduction", pp. xi-xiii; Fujita isakazu, *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 92; Kibata Yoichi, "Japanese treatment of British prisoners: The historical context, p. 137; N. Margaret Kosuge, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp. 154-155.

24 Fujiwara Akira, *Uejini shita Eireitachi*, Aoki Shoten, Tokyo, 2001, pp. 221-222.

are probably not many among the several million members of the JRCS who know the provisions of the Geneva Convention in detail".[25] At a workshop sponsored by the JRCS, Ninagawa expressed his misgivings as follows:

> "I'd like to bring up for your consideration some things I'm greatly worried about with respect to the upcoming Red Cross international conference. For example, as I stated earlier, Japan engaged in armed clashes in Manchuria and Shanghai without a declaration of war. At those times there were no prisoners of war. I got special word of this matter after the Society's Vice-President Tokugawa visited Shanghai last year; namely that when our Vice-President visited Chinese wounded in the fighting at a Shanghai hospital there were only seven of them. That he saw as many as seven was of course a good thing. But there were no prisoners of war, and also in Manchuria there were no prisoners of war. On this point I am a little worried, but perhaps it is an unfounded apprehension and everything will in fact resolve itself without a problem."[26]

As for the dramatic deterioration in the treatment of POWs held by modern Japan, major turning points to be mentioned were the armed intervention in Siberia at the end of and following the First World War, and then the so-called Manchurian Incident of 1931 and its aftermath. Communist guerrillas, either in Siberia or China, were viewed by Japan's Imperial Army more as "bandits" to be punished than as an "enemy army" to be fought with. Divisions of the Japanese Army first engaged in armed clashes with Communist soldiers and parts of a Communist-led population in China in the late 1930s.[27] The experience of this new type of warfare, namely long-drawn-out guerrilla fighting, further encouraged an indifference of the Japanese Army to human life, and the general indifference of Japan's war leaders to human life gradually caused the rank-and-file soldiers to lose morale.[28]

On the other hand, this seemingly never-ending quagmire of war may well have caused many ordinary Japanese to hope that the wartime relief

25 Ninagawa Arata, *Sekij¯uji j¯oyaku nit suite*, Japanese Red Cross Society, Tokyo, 1934, pp. 5-6.

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 41-44.

27 Fujiwara Akira, "Nitch¯u sens¯o ni okeru horyo gyakutai", in *Kikan Sens¯o Sekinin Kenky¯u*, No. 9, autumn 1995, pp. 18-23.

28 On how guerrilla warfare in China affected the Japanese Army's treatment of POWs, see Philip Towle, "The Japanese Army and the POWs", *Japanese Prisoners of War, op. cit.* (note 3), pp. 1-16.

activities of the Red Cross might spare family members and neighbours unnecessary and pointless suffering or death while fighting overseas.

One information brochure designed to attract prospective new Red Cross Society members and distributed in Japanese cities, towns and villages in 1939 speaks highly of the fact that eligibility for joining the Society is "generally applicable [to all], with no distinction as to sex, age, or nationality", but no mention is made of a non-discriminatory assistance policy. The "fundamental mission" of the JRCS is said to be to "rescue and give nursing care to the motherland's victims". At the same time, it is explained that "the keynotes of each branch [of the JRCS] throughout the country are [to show] the spirit of humanity and humanitarianism of the people of each prefecture under the guidance of the parent Society and sincerity in behind-the-lines [support for the war effort]". It is interesting to see that the sole reference to support by the Imperial Family was the rather bureaucratic-sounding locution "based on the provisions of an Imperial order". A further explanation, in non-colloquial language, of the significance of Red Cross work is given as follows:

> "(...) At times when our thoughts go out to the emotions of officers and conscripts who left gallantly on their military expeditions to the accompaniment of joyful cheers but who unfortunately later fell victims to enemy bullets or were seized by illness and groan in agony, measures to nurse them or give them other material assistance will of course be unavailable to members of their families, relatives, or neighbours. Thus we express our sincerest wish that you will give your deepest understanding to the Red Cross work which is being undertaken with your kind assistance, and will through this Red Cross work elevate to still higher levels the sincerity of the behind-the-lines service you are performing for the nation (...)."[29]

It is worth noting that Japan's war leaders, with hundreds of fabricated "moving wartime stories," continued to try to keep the reality of the war, as experienced by all parties, away from the Japanese people. For the JRCS, the period from the mid-1930s until Japan's defeat in the Second World War in 1945 brought an unprecedented expansion of its activities. For the Society's

29 Publication sent out by the head of the Mie Village sub-branch of the JRCS Yamanashi Branch, dated February 1939 and preserved in a "Red Cross Scrapbook for the Year 1939" compiled by the Matsusato Village Office, Yamanashi Prefecture, now kept in the Archives of the Enzan City Educational Committee.

network of local branches to provide returns on the investments made, so to speak, by each branch's allotted yearly dues was by no means an easy matter. But in any case the rapid growth in its activities could not have taken place without considerable effort on the part of the supporting organizations in city wards, towns and villages, or without the endeavours of those local Red Cross organizations to "win a general knowledge and understanding" of wartime Red Cross work.[30]

At the same time, Japan's war leaders were intent on "tightening up military discipline" that was seen to have gone awry since 1937 as a result of the war in China. The method chosen by the Japanese military leaders in their attempt to stabilize popular morale, or rather to ensure that their soldiers fought to the death rather than surrender ignominiously, was to give those who were about to be sent to the battlefields a ceremonial consecration at national Shinto shrines, as though they were already dead.[31] It must be remembered that during the war with China, instructions were sent to the Japanese garrisons there stating that it is "not appropriate to conduct [the campaign] rigorously observing to the last letter" international law of war while during the battle of China use of the term "POWs" was even prohibited.[32] And after the Nomonhan Skirmish in 1939, the military authorities announced that the Japanese soldiers captured by Soviet troops on the Mongolian border should all be investigated and then sternly punished, whether or not they were found guilty under the Imperial Army's criminal law and even if not indicted. As a result, only about two hundred of the Japanese POWs in the Soviet Union were sent back to their motherland, Japan, while the rest preferred to stay put in the enemy country.[33] Moreover, the information brochures on joining the JRCS made no mention at that time either of non-discrimination by nationality in the treatment of those wounded in battle or in assistance to POWs.

30 N. Margaret Kosuge, "S¯od¯oin to Nisseki bunku" (General Mobilization and the Japanese Red Cross Society Sub-branches), in Enzan City History Compilation Committee (ed.), *Enzan-shi shi, ts¯ushi hen, gekan*, Enzan City, Yamanashi Prefecture, 1998. See especially pp. 352-354.

31 For a discussion of the societal dead and wartime Japanese society, see Frederic Siordet, "Inter Arma Caritas, L'oeuvre du Comité International de la Croix-Rouge pendant la seconde guerre mondiale," *Bulletin International des Societes de la Croix-Rouge* (French edition), No. 535, March 1947, p. 479.

32 Fujiwara Akira, *Uejini shita Eireitachi, op. cit.* (note 24), pp. 222-223. N. Margaret Kosuge, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp. 157-158. Kasahara Tokushi, "Remembering the Nanking Massacre," in Fei Fei Li, Robert Sabella and David Liu (eds), *Nanking 1937 : Memory and Healing*, M.E. Sharpe, New York; 2002, pp. 75-94.

33 Fujiwara, *op. cit.* (note 27), pp. 225-228. Kusunoki Yuji, *Nomonhan jiken tte nandattanoka*, private edition, 1994.

In any part of the world, those actually sent to the battlefields are the ones who suffer most from the image gap between glorified, fictitious places of battle and the harsh reality of war. "Honourable death in battle" has of course been conspicuously acclaimed and commended throughout history in other places apart from Japan. Even within the fighting forces of Japan it had been emphasized at times other than the so-called Greater East Asian War. However, in the Japan of the period ranging from the Manchurian Incident through the prolonged war with the Western Allies, the volatile atmosphere of xenophobia meant that any remnants of what might be called internationalist terminology in relation to the Red Cross ideas were progressively eliminated by the anti-Western, nationalistic milieu.

The Japanese people's alleged lack of fear when it came to the prospect of dying in battle was cited to justify the assertion that the Japanese occupied a culturally and racially unique and superior position in comparison to "Westerners." And in Japan those who took active part in Red Cross relief activities on the battlefield set off overseas with the expectation of society that their lives might well be sacrificed to the war effort. For many ideologists making pronouncements on matters of education and culture, it became a favoured activity to draw up scenarios depicting a divide between "others" and the Japanese themselves. In such scenarios, the "others" were explained as being those who "directly sympathize with the Christianity that developed out of professions of humanitarianism" but who "cannot help but hesitate when it comes to abandoning their lives for the sake of other people", whereas conversely the Japanese were "known for being non-egocentric, self-effacing (...) and full of the spirit of sacrifice."[34] The good treatment given to POWs during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 came to be criticized as having stemmed from "a mistaken humanitarianism" allied to "Christian-type or materialist-type interpretations" originating from "Western-style concepts (...) that are in the process of undermining our time-tested traditions".[35]

Besides being a commentary on "Senjinkun" (The Battlefield Code), the quasi-classic text on military discipline, a textbook entitled *Senjinkun seikai* was meant to serve as a sort of manual of "State directives"

34 The quoted passages are from *Seishin kyōiku shiryō* (Materials for Spiritual Education) compiled by the Army's Kyōiku Sōkanbu, Vol. 9, 1940, pp. 39-41.

35 The quoted passages are from "Furyo ni kansuru kyōkun," *Kansan kyōshiryō*, No. 29, reprinted in Chaen Yoshio, *Dainippon teikokukagaichi furyo shūyōjo*, Fuji Shuppan, Tokyo, 1990.

as to how a true Japanese ought to behave in an environment of battle. It contended that in the practical administration of "benevolence" to persons who had surrendered or were otherwise in positions of having to show obedience, activities making an outward show of such benevolence were to be discouraged and "hypocrites (...) using charity for propaganda purposes" were to be criticized.[36] Such "hypocrites" would include, for example, Japan's onetime military and political ally Great Britain, and it came to be popularly thought in Japan that the taking of conciliatory steps could be little more than an imitation of the perceived "opportunism" of the British.[37]

At another level of society, however, Japan's schoolchildren were taught some elevating details of the "Red Cross spirit" during their classes in moral training and Japanese language.[38] At solemn ceremonies to see off brigades of relief nurses leaving for China, Japanese pupils voiced appeals to Red Cross workers, who were expected to be "Japanese Florence Nightingales", to "carry out your nursing work, now that you are finally going to the battlefields, as goddesses of peace, without distinction as to friend or foe, helping of course our country's wounded soldiers but also Chinese soldiers who don't understand our language".[39] Throughout the Second World War, material on the Red Cross was regularly included in the school textbooks for moral training and Japanese language classes.

In December 1939, not long after the nationwide three-day celebrations to mark the Jubilee of the 1864 Geneva Convention on 15 November (namely, to commemorate Japan's accession to the Convention in 1886), an instruction was sent to the JRCS local branches concerning the Society crest. It stated that, since the 2600th Imperial Era was to be celebrated in the following year 1940, "all JRCS members, without exception, should wear the Society crest at any national commemorations and other events that

36 Miura T¯osaku, *Senjinkun seikai*, T¯oy¯o Tosho, Tokyo, 1940, p. 81.

37 For recent research on the subject see, for example, Jane Flower, transl. N. Margaret Kosuge. "Nihongun no Eigun horyo, 1940-1945," in Kibata Y¯oichi *et al.* (ed.), *Nichiei k¯ory¯ushi 1600-2000: Seiji Gaiko*, Vol. 2, Tokyo University Press, Tokyo, 2000, pp. 167-194.

38 Nihon Sekij¯ujisha, *Nihon Sekij¯ujisha shashi k¯o*, No. 5, Tokyo, 1969, pp. 114-116.

39 For example, the transcripts of speeches given by sixth graders at the Kasuga Elementary School (Yamanashi Prefecture) and congratulatory messages given by Kasuga, Takumi and Anagiri Red Cross Brigade youth representatives on 14 September 1937, at the formal ceremony for sending off a Red Cross relief brigade under the sponsorship of the Yamanashi Branch of the JRCS, as recorded in the journal *Yamanashi Ky¯oiku*, No. 475, October 1937, pp. 48-50.

they would attend".[40] Attention was also drawn to the "incompatible benefit" that the Japanese Red Cross Society crest was equivalent to those medals and emblems honoured by the government and that only JRCS members were allowed to "wear [it] in public at any public occasions." The red cross emblem was enthusiastically admired among Japan's populace and soldiers as a visible representation of "humanitarianism" and the "Yamato spirit of love" on the battlefield.[41]

International humanitarian law and national morale

Even in the late 1930s, on the basis of experience since the Meiji period, the Japanese knew that the "propaganda potential e.g. of 'the killing of non-combatants' (...) could be considerable, especially in Europe and America."[42] The war leaders professed to believe, as advised by the *Senjinkun* and the new commentaries on it, that "benevolence" should be shown to those who surrendered and who followed orders. Even after the war with Britain and America had begun, some of Japan's military leaders continued to have qualms about behaviour that could be seen as contrary to international law, and they remained apprehensive as to the possible impact of such behaviour on both enemy and allied countries.[43] In this connection Prime Minister T¯oj¯o Hideki, who simultaneously held the post of Army Minister, made a series of obscure pronouncements in April and May 1942 on the treatment of European and American POWs which basically said that "international law" should be interpreted from Japan's own perspective. He said that the Japanese Empire should "be attentive", that POWs should "be strictly dealt with inside limits that do not go against humanity, [although] there should be no lapse into (...) mistaken humanitarianism." T¯oj¯o went on to add that "although the Japanese Empire must accurately manifest its stance both at home and abroad, it should on the other hand deal strictly

40 Instruction sent out by the head of the JRCS Yamanashi Branch, dated 23 December 1939 and preserved in the "Red Cross Scrapbook for the Year 1939".

41 "Tatakafu sekij¯uji (the fighting red cross)", photograph by Matsune Fujio, in *Shashin Bunka*, August 1943, photogravure.

42 The quoted passages are from Sat¯o Kasaku, "Jihen to kokusaih¯o kanken," in *Gaik¯o Jih¯o*, No. 801, 1938, pp. 92-101.

43 T¯oj¯o proclamation at a meeting of the Privy Council, 18 April 1942; instructions from T¯oj¯o to the Commander of Zents¯uji POW Camp, 30 May 1942; see also instructions from T¯oj¯o to newly appointed heads of detention camps for prisoners of war, 7 July 1942.

with POWs within limits that do not contravene humanity", making use of their labour to carry on the war effort, and "impressing upon local populations the excellent qualities of the Yamato race".[44]

Japanese newspapers, which underwent censorship, repeatedly reported on the correctness of Japanese treatment of Western combatants who had surrendered and on Japan's compliance with the international law of war. However, in the period extending from the early fighting in China to the end of the Second World War, Japan did violate, in many different parts of Asia, the international law that it had agreed to uphold. There were many departures from the rules concerning POWs that had been created by the Japanese Army itself. This did not simply result from a cultural dissonance between different cultures and civilizations that might be said to have had some potential for mutually apologetic resolution. Rather the Japanese had taken great pains, especially since the Russo-Japanese War, to incorporate values within the foundation of its self-identity as a national army which were in stark contrast to the "materialism" and "rationalism" of the West, and which struck a special chord in the mysticism and extreme spiritualism that were believed to be part and parcel of "the Emperor's Army".[45]

The dual task of pursuing a self-image that would stand in contrast to "the West" and maintaining the morale of a "national army" became a sort of performance designed to demonstrate one's own cultural and racial superiority vis-à-vis the West, while at the same time merging with efforts to encourage the practice of an honourable death in battle for the sake of the Emperor. In this regard it was often explained to Western Allied POWs by those connected with the running of the Japanese Army's detention camps that their presence was "very shameful" and that they were "being allowed to survive only because of the Emperor's benevolence". Many of these POWs, who found themselves in environments of daily hunger and overwork, repeated corporal violence and a complete denial of person identity, felt that the act of having to "kowtow to the Emperor" — bending their heads to the ground in the direction of the Imperial Palace — was the greatest of all humiliations.[46]

44 See Nagai Hitoshi, "Ajia Taiheiy¯o Sens¯o-ki no horyo seisaku — rikugun ch¯u¯o to kokusai j¯oki," in *Kikan Sens¯o Sekinin Kenky¯u*, No. 9, Autumn 1995.

45 Fujiwara Akira, *Nihon gunjishi*, Vol. 1: *senzen-hen*, Nihon Hy¯oronsha, Tokyo, 1987, especially pp. 120-122, 280-282.

46 Comment made by Philip Towle at Session 8 ("Post-war reconciliation: Japan's experience"), 18th International Peace Research Association Conference, Tampere, Finland, 5-9 August 2000.

In March 1942, the JRCS submitted a recommendation to the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs with regard to the "question of observing the Geneva Convention". The recommendation said that "even though one might wish to be faithful to the convention on POWs, this is a difficult matter to carry out; therefore rather than promise the impossible, which would give rise to further controversies in the future, it will be as well to go no further than to respect the spirit [of the Convention]".[47] To make such a statement was something of a tragic event for the JRCS, but was the most sincere response it was able to give under the circumstances.

An even more unfortunate event took place in the winter of 1943, when Japanese Navy personnel in Borneo executed Dr Karl Matthias Vischer, a Swiss citizen who had been sent to Borneo as a delegate by the ICRC, and his wife on suspicion of "spying". According to an extant message addressed to the ICRC by the Swiss legation in Japan around the middle of 1945, the Vischers had been arrested and charged with conspiracy: "these unfortunate people [had] 'criminally' sought to learn not only the number of PW and civilian internees in Borneo, but also their names, age, race, status, conditions of life and health, and [had attempted] to send them food."[48] Japanese records about the Vischer incident were reportedly destroyed during the war when the ship carrying them was torpedoed and sunk, and the case has never been officially recognized or admitted by the Japanese government.[49] However, if the Vischer case really did take place as stated in the message from the Swiss legation, they were incriminated for in fact having tried to do something they could hardly be expected to forego, namely to introduce humanitarianism to a place afflicted by war.

In the autumn of 1944, war propaganda materials distributed throughout Japan's cities, towns and villages were full of accounts of "beastly practices" carried out at battle sites by American and British forces "who always, as soon as they open their mouths, preach about justice, shout about humanity, and talk about humanitarianism". Listed in this report were alleged cases of "cold-bloodedness" by British forces toward comrades-in-arms among the Chinese forces and soldiers from British India, and of indiscriminate air attacks by

47 Ichimata Masao, "Senpan saiban kenky¯u yoron (ichi): 1929 nen horyo j¯oyaku jun'y¯o mondai", in *Kokusaih¯o Gaik¯o Zasshi*, Vol. 66, No. 1, June 1967, p. 19.

48 *Report of the International Committee of the Red Cross on its Activities during the Second World War* (September 1939-June 1947), *Vol. 1: General Activities*, Geneva, May 1948, p. 444.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 445.

American forces and the "demented hunting of human beings by American submarines". Attention was similarly drawn to alleged attacks by American "most malignant and cruel devils" on Japanese hospital ships displaying the "sign of justice", namely the red cross emblem, and to alleged brutalities perpetrated by British and American forces on the bodies of Japanese soldiers who had died in battle.[50] Ironically enough, this type of wartime propaganda turned out to be a safe and effective way for Japan's war leadership to continue to encourage a fighting spirit towards the end of the great conflagration.

Conclusion

The Ottoman Empire had opted for a red crescent emblem partly because it sensed that the significance of the red cross had a certain Christian basis. On the other hand, Japan had accepted the emblem of the cross in spite of doubts by some as to possible links to Christianity. Japan went on to make it a national symbol that was thought to blend with indigenous "traditions", thus becoming part of a new, consciously created "tradition" to face up to the West.

In this process, the red cross emblem gradually came to have a very strong ideological connotation closely connected to efforts to unify the Japanese nation in a structure that placed the Emperor and the Imperial Family at the top. Such a structure formed part of the basis on which to build up the Japanese nationalism that, in a non-Western international system, was expected to respond to — but stand apart from — Western Europe and even to surpass it in certain respects. Divergences tended to emerge from the 1930s to the mid-1940s, as the dual tasks of searching for Japan's own cultural and racial superiority vis-à-vis Western Europe and maintaining the morale of the "national army" combined with fanatical efforts to encourage "honourable death in battle".

Whether in the Vischer case or in the inhumane treatment meted out to Allied POWs in contravention of the international legal framework that Japan had promised to uphold, the red cross emblem did not, except perhaps in very few borderline cases, itself give rise to war crimes during the Asian War. In the Asia of the Second World War, POWs were maltreated, non-combatants were kidnapped and forced to leave their homes and efforts to render war more humane were always impeded. But somehow, throughout all this, the majority of Japanese generally entertained feelings of admiration and the most profound respect for the emblem of the Red Cross.

50 Taisei Yokusankai Ch¯osabu (ed.), *Ichioku fungeki Beiei gekisai und¯o shiry¯o*, October 1944.

Resumé

L'emblème «non religieux» de la croix rouge et le Japon

N. Margaret Kosuge

Bien que le Japon ne soit pas une nation chrétienne, il n'a pas, contrairement à la Turquie et à la Perse, décidé d'adopter son propre emblème d'adhésion à l'organisation internationale de la Croix-Rouge. Le Japon a clairement et publiquement pris position contre toute interprétation religieuse du signe de la « croix rouge » et considéré, jusqu'en 1929, qu'il ne devait y avoir qu'un seul emblème international. Néanmoins, il y avait une certaine incohérence entre le mythe, né de l'adoption par la Turquie du « croissant rouge », selon lequel le Mouvement international de la Croix-Rouge n'avait jamais eu de liens « religieux », et le mythe selon lequel l'organisation nationale de la Croix-Rouge du Japon était dénuée de toute connotation « religieuse ». Le Japon avait accepté le signe de la croix rouge puis s'était attaché à en faire un « signe national », qui devait se fondre dans les « traditions » locales pour créer une « tradition » nouvelle et plus cosmopolite. Au cours de ce processus, la Société de la Croix-Rouge du Japon s'était associée aux efforts déployés pour unifier la nation japonaise à l'intérieur d'un modèle qui conférait à l'Empereur et à la famille impériale la capacité de faire à la société internationale « eurocentrique ». Ce modèle contribuait à nourrir le nationalisme japonais qui, dans un système international non occidental, devait à la fois répondre à l'Europe occidentale, et s'en tenir à l'écart, voire la surpasser à certains égards.

Ce passage de la neutralité au sens strict à une connotation fortement idéologique explique que, sur la scène intérieure, la plupart des Japonais aient éprouvé un sentiment d'admiration et de profond respect pour l'emblème de la croix rouge. Il explique aussi que, sur la scène extérieure (c'est-à-dire, les champs de bataille), les armées japonaises ne respectaient que rarement le message universel d'humanité du signe de la croix rouge, car il était en contradiction flagrante avec la vision «indigène» de l'emblème de la croix rouge.