

Original Paper

Constructing the National Identity of Chinese Christians during Wartime: A Case Study of the Christian War Relief Committee

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Abstract

This article examines the responses of the Christian community in China to the January 28 Incident of 1932, with particular emphasis on wartime relief work and the construction of a “patriotic Christian” identity. It argues that the crisis created both an opportunity for large-scale Christian social engagement and a critical moment for Chinese Christians to renegotiate the long-contested relationship between religious faith and national belonging. Drawing on newspapers, church periodicals, YMCA publications, and contemporary Christian writings, the article first reconstructs the relief activities undertaken by Christian organizations, including refugee sheltering, medical aid, fundraising, material donations, and postwar rehabilitation. It then offers a case study of the Shanghai Christian War Relief Committee, showing how its rapid mobilization, interdenominational cooperation, professionalized management, and revolving relief mechanisms reflected the organizational strengths of modern Christian institutions in China. Finally, the article analyzes how Chinese Christians, under the pressure of anti-Christian prejudice and wartime nationalism, employed public discourse and contextual biblical interpretation to articulate a patriotic identity compatible with Christian belief. By demonstrating that Christian participation in wartime relief was simultaneously a form of humanitarian practice, social mobilization, and identity reconstruction, the article sheds light on the role of Christianity in modern China’s national crisis and contributes to broader discussions of religion, nationalism, and the indigenization of Christianity.

Keywords

January 28 Incident, Christian War Relief Committee, patriotic identity, religious nationalism

On the night of January 28, 1932, Japanese marines launched a surprise assault on Chinese military positions in Shanghai’s Chapei (闸北) district, initiating what would become known as the January 28 Incident (一二八事变) or the Shanghai War of 1932 (一二八淞沪会战). The conflict, which persisted

until a ceasefire was negotiated under international mediation in early March, devastated one of Shanghai's most densely populated Chinese-administered neighborhoods. The immediate humanitarian consequences were catastrophic: an estimated 30,000 civilians fled the war zone within the first 48 hours, pouring into the International Settlement and French Concession with little more than the clothes on their backs.

Following the outbreak of the Incident, the Christian community in China responded with remarkable speed, launching relief operations of considerable scale across multiple dimensions. These efforts encompassed refugee sheltering, medical treatment for the wounded, fundraising and material donations, organizational mobilization, appeals to the international community, and the issuing of public declarations. Collectively, they demonstrated the organizational capacity and social service traditions of Christian bodies when confronted with national crisis. Shirley S. Garrett, in her study of the Chinese YMCA, provided a detailed account of the deep institutional foundations that organizations such as the YMCA had established in the domain of urban social service in China (Note 1). These foundations were fully tested and displayed during the January 28 Incident.

1. Wartime Relief Work of the Christian Community

1.1 Refugee Sheltering and Medical Treatment

In the immediate aftermath of the war, the most pressing humanitarian need was the accommodation of the vast numbers of refugees fleeing the combat zones. Residents of Chapei, Hongkew, and surrounding districts fled under bombardment, many carrying nothing but clothes on their backs as they poured into the foreign concessions and other areas of relative safety. Churches, YMCA buildings, schools, and other Christian institutions quickly opened their doors, becoming crucial sites of refugee reception. According to a report by Josephine Brown, a participant in the relief work, refugees from Chapei flooded into the International Settlement at an alarming rate: "On Saturday [February 8] there were six hundred refugees, and this afternoon alone we received sixteen hundred." (Note 2) The new YMCA building on Boulevard de Montigny subsequently housed 900 refugees, most of whom came from the Christian community in Hongkew. The older YMCA building on Szechuen Road also took in 1,100 impoverished Cantonese refugees, who were cared for by Cantonese church members and fed through the Cantonese Guild (Note 3).

According to statistics compiled by the *Da Wan Bao* (大晚报), as of February 15, 1932, six refugee shelters operated by Christian organizations were accommodating more than 6,000 displaced persons.

Table 1. Christian-Operated Refugee Shelters as of February 15, 1932 (Note 4)

Location	Address	Number of Refugees
Tian'an Church	No. 1 Shantung Road	2,258
YMCA	Szechuen Road	1,233
Continental Emporium (upper floors)	Nanking Road	2,310
St. Peter's Church	No. 301 Avenue Road	210
Islamic Mosque	Chekiang Road	31
Anglican Church	No. 423 Route Lafayette	85

Beyond Shanghai, churches in places such as Jiangyin (江阴) also participated actively in refugee work. Reports noted that “the Seventh-day Adventist Church established shelters in Nanwai and Tongyun Town to provide relief for war-zone refugees,” (Note 5) indicating that the war’s impact radiated outward into surrounding regions and that the Christian relief network expanded accordingly.

In the sphere of medical care for the wounded, the Christian contribution was equally notable. The prominent Catholic layman Lu Bohong (陆伯鸿) moved swiftly after hostilities began, “securing the Sacred Heart Girls’ High School on Avenue Joffre to establish a temporary hospital with approximately two hundred beds... staffed by doctors and nurses recruited from Hong Kong, with assistance from several Catholic nuns.” (Note 6) As president of the Catholic Action Society, Lu also “converted a section of the Xinpuyutang into Red Cross Wounded Soldiers’ Hospital No. 16, serving as its director... and designated another section of the building along with the Catholic Action Society premises as Wounded Soldiers’ Hospital No. 30, to receive injured soldiers and civilians.” (Note 7) Lu Bohong’s personal contribution was extraordinary; he leveraged the material resources of Catholic institutions to establish multiple military hospitals, embodying both individual patriotic zeal and the social mobilization capacity of Catholic charitable organizations during wartime.

The Shanghai YWCA likewise participated actively in caring for the wounded, “organizing the National Salvation Temporary Relief Association to carry out comfort and relief work, and recently establishing a short-term nursing training program to assist with nursing duties at various wounded soldiers’ hospitals.” (Note 8) Given the acute shortage of nurses across all hospitals during the conflict, Christian organizations collaborated with physicians to establish nursing training courses, the first cohort of which enrolled “more than sixty students, with a prescribed three-month curriculum.” (Note 9) This short-term training model effectively filled wartime gaps in medical personnel while providing participants with practical service skills. Christian medical institutions had long served a personnel-training function in modern China. Kenneth Scott Latourette observed as early as 1929 that mission hospitals and nursing schools constituted important training grounds for Western-trained

medical professionals in China. The emergency nursing programs of the January 28 Incident can be understood as a wartime adaptation and continuation of this tradition.

Regarding the longer-term settlement of refugees, the Shanghai Christian Refugee Relief Association also established a vocational guidance department within the Continental Emporium shelter, which “daily referred refugees with domestic service skills to positions in private households, with considerable numbers placed.” (Note 10) This initiative demonstrated that Christian relief efforts looked beyond immediate crisis management toward helping refugees regain the capacity for self-sufficiency, embodying the principle of teaching people to fish rather than merely giving them fish.

1.2 Fundraising, Material Donations, and Rear-Area Support

After the outbreak of the January 28 Incident, Christian organizations across the country launched fundraising and donation drives in support of frontline soldiers and rear-area refugees. These campaigns spanned major cities including Beiping, Nanjing, Guangzhou, and Changsha, with participants drawn from every stratum of the Christian community. This capacity for cross-regional mobilization relied in considerable measure upon the nationwide organizational network that Christianity had developed in China. As the China Continuation Committee’s 1922 survey demonstrated, by the early 1920s Protestant Christianity had established extensive church organizations and communication systems across all Chinese provinces. During the January 28 Incident, this network was transformed into a channel for transmitting material and financial support to the frontlines.

In Beiping, the YWCA “joined with the Women’s Association, the Women’s National Salvation Ten-Person Groups, and the Self-Awakening National Salvation Association to hold a major fundraising rally for the Nineteenth Route Army. On February 14, a general mobilization meeting was convened, dividing participants into twenty teams, each with one team leader and nine members. When the fundraising concluded, a total of more than fifteen thousand yuan had been collected. The distribution plan allocated one half to the Nineteenth Route Army, with the remainder split evenly between volunteer armies and relief work.” (Note 11) Fifteen thousand yuan represented a substantial sum at the time, and the distribution formula reflected the Christian community’s dual concern with military resistance and humanitarian care.

In Guangzhou, the Women’s Refugee Relief Association sponsored by the YWCA donated large quantities of material for Shanghai refugees. Records show that “from March 4 to March 23, four shipments were dispatched, all delivered to the YWCA National Association in Shanghai for distribution. The first shipment comprised eighty-four large crates, the second fifty-five, the third eighty-one, and the fourth fifty-four. Total relief goods, excluding food items, included more than one hundred thousand articles of new and used clothing.” (Note 12) This volume of over one hundred thousand garments reflected the remarkably efficient social mobilization achieved by the Guangzhou YWCA in just twenty days.

In Changsha, “the evening school students of the [YWCA], numbering more than one hundred, upon learning that the Japanese had seized Shanghai and that our Nineteenth Route Army was resisting

vigorously, organized fundraising teams and collected over forty yuan, in addition to receiving more than thirty yuan in comfort donations for the Shanghai anti-Japanese forces, all of which was forwarded to the Nineteenth Route Army through the local National Salvation Fundraising Committee.” (Note 13) Although forty yuan was not a large amount, it represented a considerable effort for evening school students, testifying to the patriotic enthusiasm of grassroots Christians.

Perhaps most moving were the small donations from remote areas. “Christian brethren in Taizhuang, Shandong, economized on food and clothing to contribute ten yuan to the Nineteenth Route Army. Though the amount is modest, their earnestness is truly admirable.” (Note 14) The phrase “economized on food and clothing” vividly captures the sincerity with which ordinary believers at the grassroots level strained their limited resources to contribute whatever they could to the resistance. This case also reflects the degree to which Christianity had by the early 1930s penetrated China’s smaller towns and rural communities, no longer remaining solely a religion of the treaty ports.

In Nanjing, the Christian community “not only donated money enthusiastically but also helped to make clothing and bedding. Items completed and sent to wounded soldiers’ hospitals across Shanghai already numbered several hundred, with production still continuing.” (Note 15) The Shanghai YWCA also organized factory women workers to “produce more than one hundred articles of children’s clothing,” attending to the particular needs of children among the refugee population (Note 16). The Beijing YWCA specifically made jackets for Nineteenth Route Army soldiers (Note 17). These material contributions, combined with monetary donations, constituted the full picture of Christian rear-area support.

At the aggregate level, data compiled by the National Christian Council of China indicated that “during the two or three months of the Japanese attack on Shanghai, churches across the country remitted funds to the Council for wounded soldiers and refugees. Approximately twelve thousand yuan was spent on refugees and approximately six thousand yuan on wounded soldiers. An additional one thousand yuan was sent directly to the Nineteenth Route Army for wounded soldier relief.” (Note 18) These sums channeled through the National Christian Council, together with the materials and funds donated directly by local churches, constituted a significant material force in support of the Shanghai resistance.

2. The Shanghai Christian War Relief Committee

Among the numerous Christian relief activities during the January 28 Incident, the Shanghai Christian War Relief Committee (基督教战时救济委员会) stood out as one of the most organized, largest in scale, and most systematically operated relief bodies. This section provides a detailed examination of the Committee’s establishment, operations, and outcomes. From the perspective of organizational sociology, the Committee’s operational model represented the concentrated expression of decades of social service practice accumulated by the YMCA system in China. Since its introduction into China, the YMCA had gradually developed what may be termed a “service-oriented” organizational model adapted to Chinese urban society, characterized by problem-solving orientation, volunteer mobilization,

and inter-institutional cooperation. The Shanghai Christian War Relief Committee was a paradigmatic deployment of this model under wartime conditions.

2.1 Establishment and Leadership

The formation of the Shanghai Christian War Relief Committee occurred with extraordinary rapidity. According to YMCA promotional materials, “within twenty-four hours from the outbreak of the war, the National Committee took the initiative in calling together representatives of all Christian organizations, national and local, in Shanghai for the purpose of organizing a central committee to give relief to the war-stricken. Immediately the Christian War Relief Committee of Shanghai was organized (Note 19).” The speed with which organizational construction was completed within a single day reflected the emergency response capacity of institutions such as the YMCA.

This broad participatory base ensured that the organization possessed cross-denominational and cross-institutional representativeness. The Committee was chaired by Mr. K. Z. Loh (陆干臣), with other prominent participants including Li Guansen (李观森) and W. W. Lockwood (骆维廉) of the YMCA National Association. The Committee defined two core operational directions: first, to rescue helpless people stranded in the war zone; and second, to care for homeless refugees (Note 20). These twin objectives responded to the most pressing humanitarian needs while providing clear goal orientation for subsequent work.

The Committee’s organizational architecture reflected the professionalized management traditions of the YMCA system. It deployed approximately fifty workers organized into ten departments covering registration, medical care, nursing, clothing distribution, sanitation, and night duty, among others. All personnel were volunteers, the majority drawn from the YMCA, Christian schools, and various churches (Note 21). As operations continued, volunteer numbers grew steadily, ultimately reaching a force of one hundred and thirty Chinese and fifty foreign workers (Note 22).

2.2 Rescue Operations and Refugee Camp Management

The Committee launched rescue operations immediately upon its formation. During the first two days of conflict, “motor-cars, carriages, rickshas and wheel-barrow brought 30,000 distraught people from the war area into the central district... most of them without any of their belongings except the clothes they were wearing (Note 23).” YMCA, YWCA, school, and church buildings were among the first to open their doors to refugees. As the influx of displaced persons continued to grow, existing facilities quickly proved inadequate. The Committee recognized the need for a much larger accommodation facility and turned its attention to the Continental Bank’s large commercial building, still under construction at the corner of Nanking Road and Shantung Road. Covering approximately two acres, the building was well suited to shelter several thousand refugees. The Continental Bank’s manager generously offered it to the Committee free of charge (Note 24).

The first major refugee camp, housed in the Continental Emporium, was formally established on approximately February 5 and operated for roughly six weeks. It served a total of approximately five thousand refugees, with a peak simultaneous population of thirty-two hundred. Management was

provided by five YMCA secretaries and an equal number of YWCA secretaries working full-time in executive roles, supported by more than one hundred and fifty volunteers from churches, schools, hospitals, and Christian associations (Note 25).

Camp management involved clear division of labor and professional specialization. Boy scouts maintained order, students from Christian universities (notably the University of Shanghai) handled registration, and hospital personnel directed sanitary and medical work. A temporary hospital and clinic were established within the camp, staffed by volunteer doctors and nurses who treated an average of one hundred patients per day. The participation of Christian university students in social service reflected the “whole-person education” philosophy of church-affiliated schools (Note 26).

At a fundraising luncheon on February 19, 1932, Lockwood provided donors with a detailed account of conditions in the various shelters. He reported that Moore Memorial Church housed eight hundred persons, the new YMCA building on Boulevard de Montigny held nine hundred, and the old Szechuen Road building accommodated one thousand Cantonese refugees. He noted in particular that “rooms meant for one person have now families of six to eight persons in them, but it is remarkable how these people have settled down.” (Note 27) The Continental Emporium camp faced certain difficulties in its early days. Reports indicated that “at first there was some sickness and an outbreak of measles. The sanitary conditions were not good,” but the Shanghai Municipal Council’s Health Department intervened promptly, “vaccinating the people and looking after the sanitary arrangements,” with notable success (Note 28). This episode demonstrated the Committee’s capacity to coordinate effectively with municipal authorities when confronting public health challenges.

Beyond basic shelter and sustenance, the camp developed a diverse array of service programs. “Within a short time a school, with kindergarten and five other classes, was carried on by teachers, most of whom were refugees themselves. Recreational and social meetings were arranged. Evangelistic meetings and personal interviews cared for the religious needs. Committees on vocational guidance and employment were organized which helped in finding work for hundreds of the refugees (Note 29).” These programs transcended simple emergency relief, embodying a philosophy of holistic care. Jun Xing’s research has shown that the “Social Gospel” philosophy promoted by the YMCA in China emphasized comprehensive service to the whole person, addressing not only material needs but also spiritual, educational, and social dimensions. The simultaneous provision of education, recreation, and religious activities in the refugee camp was a concrete manifestation of this philosophy in practice.

Relief work, however, was not without obstacles. Japanese military interference constrained the scope of rescue operations. One report noted that “the refugee relief committee co-organized by the YMCA has in recent days been hindered by the enemy army, unable to go directly to various locations for rescue. Thus they have only been able to station personnel with flags between Brennan Road and Zhongshan Road, guiding and taking in those who manage to escape.” (Note 30) This record reveals the practical difficulties of conducting humanitarian work in an active war environment.

A second refugee camp was established in uncompleted buildings on Brenan Road, opening on approximately March 1 and closing on May 20, a span of roughly eleven weeks. This camp accommodated a total of approximately thirty-five hundred refugees, with a peak population of twenty-one hundred. It was staffed principally by faculty, staff, and students from St. Mary's School and St. John's University.

2.3 Rehabilitation Work and Post-Emergency Arrangements

As hostilities subsided, the Committee's focus shifted gradually from emergency relief toward rehabilitation and post-crisis settlement. This phase of work reflected the Committee's attention to the long-term needs of refugees and its systematic approach to planning.

For rehabilitation, the Committee adopted a "church sub-committee" system. The decision was made to "require each church to establish a relief sub-committee, to carefully review refugee applications for assistance, and to submit to the War Relief Committee lists of persons requiring aid along with recommended levels of support." This institutional design exploited the community-network advantages of local churches, whose congregants possessed familiarity with neighborhood conditions and could effectively verify applications. Daniel Bays has noted that Christian churches in Chinese communities often formed social networks centered on the church building, and the Committee leveraged precisely this network to achieve targeted relief distribution. Eligible recipients were "essentially limited to former Chapei residents who had lost their homes and livelihoods due to the war." Two forms of assistance were offered: outright grants for the most destitute, addressing immediate needs for food, clothing, and shelter; and small interest-free loans to help people resume their trades. (Note 31)

The microloan system was the most innovative feature of the Committee's rehabilitation work. "After implementing the lending program, it was found that many small shops and household industries ruined by the war could be reopened with just a small amount of working capital, including street vendors, mobile stall operators, grocery store owners, and money-exchange operators." (Note 32) This finding demonstrated that the economic damage inflicted on ordinary people by the war was in many cases not irreversible; the key was whether they could obtain the startup capital needed to begin again. The loan program's reach was considerable. Beyond small traders, it also assisted large numbers of low-income workers from the Commercial Press: "this major printing enterprise had been destroyed by the war, leaving 3,700 employees jobless; by that time only one hundred remained employed by the company." (Note 33) Rickshaw pullers, casual laborers, and agricultural workers were likewise among the beneficiaries. A small number of church workers also received assistance, though most were supported directly by their own congregations.

Regarding loan terms, "the repayment period was six months, renewable upon application. The first term was interest-free, with only nominal interest charged on renewals. Approximately half of all applicants were women." (Note 34) The six-month term and initial interest-free conditions were quite generous for people struggling to recover economically in the aftermath of war. The fact that women

constituted half of all applicants is also noteworthy, reflecting the heavy toll that the conflict exacted upon the female population.

Significantly, the Committee's assistance "was not limited to Christians; however, all recipients were required to have a church sub-committee serve as guarantor. The vast majority of those assisted had some connection with the churches, and sub-committee members were familiar with their family circumstances." (Note 35) This approach ensured both breadth of coverage (not restricted to Christians) and accountability through the church guarantor mechanism. From the perspective of the sociology of religion, the use of social services directed at non-believers to expand institutional social influence represented an established strategy in Christianity's development in China. Modern Christian institutions' social services, including medical care, education, and charitable work, were characteristically directed at all members of society rather than exclusively at the faithful. The Committee's approach continued this tradition.

With regard to organizational sustainability, the Committee made an arrangement of considerable foresight: "Each church sub-committee was responsible for collecting loan repayments, and all recovered funds were to remain with the local church as principal for a continuing relief and loan fund, managed independently by the congregation. In this way, the Christian War Relief Committee could dissolve once its existing funds had been distributed, while the repaid loan principal would continue to circulate for subsequent relief work." This design transformed one-time wartime relief funds into a sustainable community assistance mechanism, demonstrating the Committee's organizational foresight. Furthermore, "field investigations predicted that demand for medical relief would be enormous once refugees returned home. The Committee specially allocated five thousand yuan to support the North Shanghai Baptist Church in establishing a permanent clinic in Chapei. The church's central location made it well suited as a continuing relief center, and the clinic's medical staff were deeply appreciated by the suffering local population." (Note 36) This dedicated allocation provided crucial support for post-war medical recovery in the Chapei district.

2.4 Contemporary Social Assessment of CWRC

Contemporary observers gave high marks to the Committee's work. One report noted that YMCA National Association figures including Loh, Li Guansen, and Lockwood, "upon the outbreak of the Shanghai war, coordinated Shanghai's various church organizations to establish the Refugee Relief Committee, setting up shelters at the Continental Emporium and on Brenan Road, accommodating war-zone refugees, and devising methods to rescue innocent compatriots who had been detained. After cessation of hostilities, they further managed reconstruction and rehabilitation in Chapei, Jiangwan, and other areas. Their achievements were outstanding and received widespread praise from society." (Note 37) This assessment indicates that the Committee's work earned recognition not only within Christian circles but also among the broader public.

Other reports praised the University of Shanghai boy scouts for maintaining order at the Continental Emporium camp, noting that "their spirit of service is especially admirable." The Christian Refugee

Relief Association at the Continental Emporium “provided meals daily for more than four thousand persons, all funded by generous donations from committee supporters,” testifying to the charitable capacity of the Christian community. (Note 38)

From an organizational perspective, the Shanghai Christian War Relief Committee exhibited several distinguishing characteristics. First, it responded with extraordinary speed, completing organizational construction within twenty-four hours of the war’s outbreak. Second, it operated through inter-institutional collaboration, jointly established by thirty Christian organizations in a manner that transcended denominational boundaries. Third, it practiced professionalized management with clear departmental divisions and established workflows. Fourth, it demonstrated strong volunteer mobilization capacity, ultimately assembling one hundred and eighty Chinese and foreign volunteers. Fifth, it emphasized sustainability, converting short-term relief into a long-term community service mechanism through the church sub-committee system and revolving fund design.

The Committee’s operational model represented a concentrated display of the social service experience and organizational management capacity accumulated over decades by the YMCA system in China. Since its introduction in the late nineteenth century, the YMCA had built extensive experience in urban social service, training a cadre of professionals equipped with modern management concepts and a service-oriented ethos. The January 28 Incident provided an occasion for these capacities to be displayed in concentrated form, demonstrating the distinctive value of Christian institutions in responding to social crises. At the same time, the Committee’s work furnished valuable organizational experience and operational templates for the much larger-scale Christian wartime relief efforts that would follow during the full-scale War of Resistance.

3. Relief Works and the Construction of a “Patriotic Christian” Identity

The activities of the Christian community during the January 28 Incident were not merely emergency responses to an immediate crisis. They also represented a concentrated manifestation and attempted breakthrough of the identity predicament that Chinese Christians had long faced. Ever since Christianity’s nineteenth-century entry into China, the label of “foreign religion” (洋教) had persistently troubled Chinese Christian communities. Yang Tianhong’s research examined in detail the rise of the anti-Christian movement of the 1920s, demonstrating how the movement’s discursive construction linking Christianity tightly to imperialism produced deep and lasting damage to the public image of Chinese Christians. Ka-che Yip’s research further showed that the narratives produced during the anti-Christian movement, including claims that “Christianity is a tool of imperialist aggression” and that “Christians are unpatriotic,” circulated widely in society and retained considerable rhetorical inertia even after the movement subsided. (Note 39) Although the anti-Christian movement had receded by the late 1920s, these prejudices continued to exert significant influence in general public opinion.

The outbreak of the January 28 Incident sharpened this identity predicament to a new degree of urgency. When the nation faced the pressing crisis of foreign invasion, how could Christians prove their

patriotism? How could they answer the accusation that Christians were indifferent to national affairs? This was not merely a practical political question but a profound problem of identity. Ryan Dunch, in his study of modern Chinese Christian identity construction, proposed the important concept of “double marginality,” whereby Chinese Christians were neither fully accepted by indigenous society (because of the foreign origins of their religion) nor fully embraced as insiders by Western churches (because of their Chinese identity), leaving them caught in a doubly marginal position. (Note 40) The patriotic discourse construction undertaken by Christians during the January 28 Incident can be understood as an active attempt to break free from this double marginality.

Shortly after the Incident, an author writing under the pen name Jingchi published an essay entitled “The National Salvation Movement and the Religious Spirit,” which confronted the accusation directly: “Non-Christians strongly suspect that Christians are unpatriotic, calling Christianity a foreign religion, believing that once a person becomes Christian they have swallowed some Western bewitching potion and will never again awaken. This kind of slander was especially severe in earlier times, and persists still today. Against such slanders we must constantly defend ourselves... We must demonstrate that Christians absolutely support the patriotic movement and will by no means fall behind others in patriotic action.” (Note 41)

This passage articulates the predicament facing Chinese Christians with striking directness: society commonly equated Christianity with “foreign religion” and conversion with being “bewitched,” a prejudice that was “severe in earlier times and persists still today.” In such a rhetorical environment, Christians needed to “constantly defend” their patriotic stance, which was itself a position of frustration. The author’s responsive strategy was clear: prove through concrete action that Christians “will by no means fall behind others” in patriotic commitment. Jingchi went further to propose a specific plan of action: utilizing the nationwide missionary network as a vehicle for national salvation propaganda. “Our missionaries, distributed throughout the countryside, constitute a formidable propaganda corps. Guangzhou students are now taking ten days off to go into the villages for propaganda work, but the geographic reach of our missionaries probably exceeds theirs. If our missionaries can do national crisis propaganda work where they are, they can sustain it longer than the students, and the results would certainly be considerable.” This proposal was insightful in that it recast the Christian organizational network as a tool for patriotic mobilization, attempting to demonstrate that Christianity was not merely compatible with patriotism but could serve as a positive force in the national salvation movement.

Li Shirang, a Christian layperson from Anhui, published an essay entitled “The National Consciousness of Christians” that responded from a different angle to the charge that “Christians lack national consciousness”: “Since the September 18 incident in the northeastern provinces last year, and the great battle in Shanghai this spring, national calamities have come one after another. On the surface, we Christians seem not to have engaged in any particularly vigorous actions, and thus are often viewed by our compatriots as unpatriotic, as lacking national consciousness and being indifferent to the survival or

destruction of the state. This is the confusion of onlookers, who do not realize that we Christians' patriotism operates not through arms but through peace." (Note 42)

Li Shirang's defensive strategy acknowledged that Christians "seem not to have engaged in any particularly vigorous actions" on the surface, but reframed this as a difference in method rather than an absence of commitment. This reasoning possessed internal coherence, yet it also reflected the subtle predicament Christians faced when confronted with the dominant social expectation of military resistance: they needed to express a patriotic stance while not entirely abandoning Christian pacifist principles.

One of the most important discursive strategies employed by Chinese Christians in constructing the "patriotic Christian" image was the search for theological foundations of patriotism within Scripture. By citing the words and deeds of Jesus and the Old Testament prophets, Christians attempted to demonstrate that patriotism not only did not contradict faith but was in fact an inherent obligation of faith. Duan Qi, in her study of the indigenization of Chinese Christianity, noted that one important dimension of the indigenization movement was "contextual hermeneutics," that is, the reinterpretation of biblical texts through the lens of Chinese social realities and cultural circumstances. The patriotic readings of Scripture produced by Christians during the January 28 Incident were paradigmatic cases of this contextual hermeneutic practice.

In his essay "The National Consciousness of Christians," Li Shirang offered an argument grounded in Luke 19:41-44. This passage records Jesus weeping over Jerusalem as he approached the city. Li Shirang argued that since Jerusalem was subsequently destroyed by Roman armies, Jesus's weeping showed that he "grieved for his nation being trampled by enemies in every way," thereby proving that the Savior Jesus possessed national consciousness. Li Shirang also cited Daniel 6:10, noting that the prophet Daniel "though he worshipped God, never forgot his homeland." After being taken captive to Babylon, Daniel continued to pray facing Jerusalem, which Li interpreted as evidence of the prophet's love for his country.

On the basis of these two biblical examples, Li Shirang concluded: "We know well that both our Lord Jesus and the prophet Daniel were richly endowed with national consciousness. In other words, both possessed patriotic thought and action. Should not Christians today likewise hold national consciousness, emulating the Lord's weeping over Jerusalem by warning our compatriots to turn from evil toward good, so as to receive God's mercy? And should we not further emulate Daniel's zealous prayer for his nation, that God might forgive our people and look upon our country so as to avoid repeating past catastrophes? This is our most earnest hope." (Note 43)

Writing at nearly the same time, Chen Qiao published an essay entitled "The Responsibility of Christians amid National Crisis" that followed an almost identical argumentative path. Chen Qiao likewise cited Luke 19, describing Jesus's grief over Jerusalem, and drew the conclusion that "the Lord Christ's fervent patriotic attitude was expressed not in sloganeering but in genuine tears flowing from the heart." (Note 44) This reading defined Jesus's weeping as a "patriotic attitude," constituting a rather

bold hermeneutic practice that relocated a text belonging to the domains of eschatology and soteriology within a nationalist interpretive framework. Lam Wing-hung, in his analysis of Chinese theological thought during the Republican period, noted that Chinese social context exerted a profound influence on biblical interpretation, producing a distinctive tradition of “contextual reading.” (Note 45) Li Shirang’s and Chen Qiao’s patriotic readings of Luke exemplified this tradition.

Building on this foundation, Chen Qiao further argued: “All of us Christians, nurtured by the Lord Christ’s patriotic spirit, should naturally be no less zealous in our patriotism than others. Especially for Christians living in this time of grave national crisis, the responsibility of patriotism must be borne with redoubled effort.” More concretely, Chen Qiao enumerated ten responsibilities that Christians should fulfill, spanning the spectrum from prayer to direct action: earnest prayer for the national crisis; organizing diplomatic support associations; permanent refusal to trade with Japanese or purchase Japanese goods; formation of Christian youth military units to serve in the vanguard should war be declared; organizing comfort and relief corps; proclaiming truth to awaken the people; organizing peace-promotion associations to end internal strife; organizing propaganda bodies to expose Japanese aggression; contributing financially to churches for national salvation activities; and sacrificing everything in service to the nation for those with talent and ability.

The ordering of these ten responsibilities is carefully layered: beginning with spiritual prayer, proceeding through economic boycott, advancing to military participation, moving to social organizing and propaganda, and concluding with sacrifice and dedication. The fourth item, stating that “should the nation declare war on Japan, able-bodied Christians should organize youth military units and participate as vanguards,” was particularly radical, directly challenging the traditional reservations of Christian pacifism regarding military service. This reflected the extent to which, under the pressure of national crisis, some Chinese Christians were prepared to make decisive choices between patriotism and pacifist principles.

The manifesto of the Chinese Christians’ National Salvation Association also made an important theological contribution. It defined anti-Japanese action as “not only fulfilling the heaven-ordained duty of citizens to save the nation and the race, but also realizing the longstanding aspiration of believers to uphold righteousness.” (Note 46) The concept of “righteousness” (公义) here derived directly from the biblical notion of justice, investing resistance against Japan with the theological coloring of a just war. The manifesto further called upon believers to “uphold the legacy of Christ’s sacrifice and struggle, and shoulder the responsibility of saving humanity and the world,” thereby transforming the spirit of Christ’s sacrifice into spiritual motivation for patriotic action.

4. Conclusion

The January 28 Shanghai War of 1932 constitutes not only a significant event in the military and political history of modern China, but also an indispensable juncture for examining the historical development of Christianity in modern China. Through the lens of this particular historical moment, it

becomes evident that the Christian community was by no means a marginal force detached from the national crisis. Rather, it participated deeply in the resistance, relief, and public mobilization of Chinese society through multiple channels, revealing in the process its distinctive social role and the logic underlying its collective identity construction. A systematic examination of Christian activities during the January 28 Incident demonstrates that the war served not only as a critical arena in which Chinese Christians enacted their social responsibilities and religious ethics, but also as a pivotal occasion for reinterpreting their faith, responding to social skepticism, reshaping their collective image, and advancing the indigenization of Christianity in China.

In the wake of the Incident, both Western missionaries stationed in Shanghai and Chinese Christians responded publicly and promptly to the atrocities committed by the Japanese military. Representative texts include the jointly signed declarations of British and American missionaries, open letters addressed to the League of Nations by multiple signatories, and national salvation manifestos issued by Chinese Christian bodies. Drawing upon firsthand witness and unambiguous moral conviction, these documents exposed and condemned Japanese aggression, including undeclared warfare, the bombardment of civilian districts, and the killing of innocent lives. Such pronouncements preserved vital historical facts and furnished the international community with reliable material for understanding the true nature of the Incident. They also demonstrated that the Christian community did not remain silent in the face of national crisis, but actively intervened in the public sphere, translating religious ethical judgment into socially directed speech and political action. The statements of Chinese Christians were particularly noteworthy in that they combined denunciation of aggressive atrocities with calls for patriotic national salvation, endowing their discourse with the triple function of historical documentation, moral appeal, and social mobilization.

Simultaneously, the large-scale relief operations conducted by the Christian community during the war provided a more concrete illustration of its practical engagement amid national crisis. From refugee sheltering and medical treatment of the wounded, to fundraising and material donation campaigns organized by churches and Christian associations across the country; from the establishment of specialized relief bodies, to the mobilization of church networks for international support; from the issuance of declarations and the integration of resources, to the extension of wartime relief into post-conflict rehabilitation, the scope of Christian action encompassed nearly every dimension of wartime social assistance. These practices, on the one hand, carried forward the longstanding charitable service traditions of modern Christianity, and on the other hand, highlighted the institutional advantages that Christian organizations possessed in resource integration, social mobilization, cross-regional communication, and emergency response. In other words, under the pressures of the January 28 Incident, the Christian community appeared not merely as a purveyor of moral exhortation but, through sustained and concrete action, became an integral component of the wartime social relief system.

Among these efforts, the Shanghai Christian War Relief Committee deserves particular attention. Established within an extremely short period after the outbreak of hostilities and jointly initiated by

multiple Christian organizations, the Committee subsequently demonstrated a high degree of organizational sophistication, systematization, and sustained operation through the creation of large refugee camps, the settlement and assistance of masses of displaced persons, the provision of multiple forms of aid, and the delivery of post-emergency rehabilitation support. Its work did not halt at temporary emergency sheltering and material distribution, but extended further into vocational rehabilitation assistance, microloan programs, and the design of more sustainable community relief mechanisms. This progression from emergency aid to long-term rehabilitation reflected not only the increasingly mature professionalization of Christian relief activities at the time, but also the practical capacity to combine volunteer mobilization, inter-institutional cooperation, and organizational management. It is thus apparent that the Christian community's social participation during the January 28 Incident was neither scattered nor improvised, but rather embodied, to a significant degree, the integration of modern organizational logic with the religious tradition of public service.

Of still greater significance, the January 28 Incident became a crucial historical occasion for the collective construction of a "patriotic Christian" identity among Chinese believers. Since the introduction of Christianity into modern China, the faith had long confronted accusations of being a "foreign religion" and the charge that "Christians are unpatriotic." This structural social prejudice compelled Chinese Christians, in times of national crisis, to bear a burden of identity justification far more complex than that faced by other social groups. That is to say, they needed not only to demonstrate through action their solidarity with the fate of nation and people, but also to prove further that such a patriotic stance did not contradict their religious faith, and could indeed find support at the theological and ethical levels. It was precisely against this background that Chinese Christians undertook to excavate from Scripture and Christian doctrine legitimate grounds for patriotism, to interpret patriotic action as a constituent element of faithful practice, and to attempt a synthesis of Christianity's international connections and charitable traditions with the Chinese project of national salvation. The aim was to dissolve the tension between religious belief and national identification that had been continuously amplified by critics. The significance of this discursive practice lay not merely in addressing the pressures of public opinion at a given moment, but more broadly in advancing the deepening of Christian indigenization and contextualization, extending the process of adaptation from the domains of ecclesiastical institution and theological thought into those of political identity and public recognition.

What the January 28 Incident reveals, therefore, is not limited to the moral expression and social service of the Christian community during a national emergency. It is, more profoundly, the process by which Chinese Christians reshaped their collective positioning, negotiated the relationship between faith and patriotism, and constructed a composite identity within the historical circumstances of national peril. Viewed from a broader historical perspective, the patriotic actions of Christians during this event were, in essence, part of the wider participation of all social strata and groups in the anti-Japanese national salvation movement, reflecting the general logic of social mobilization under

conditions of national crisis. Yet at the same time, the Christian community, by virtue of its religious character, exhibited a distinctiveness absent from other social organizations: its patriotic speech and action were consistently accompanied by theological self-justification. It was precisely this dual task of participating in national salvation while simultaneously demonstrating the consonance of faith with that salvation that endows Christian activities during the January 28 Incident with research value exceeding that of ordinary social history.

In sum, the January 28 Incident should be regarded as a moment of transitional importance in the modern history of Chinese Christianity. It not only concretely demonstrated the practical contributions made by the Christian community in response to national crisis, but also profoundly revealed how Chinese Christians, within a specific historical situation, reconciled through speech and action the relationship between religious faith and national identification, and on that basis advanced the reconstruction of their public image and collective identity. From this vantage point, the examination of the relationship between the January 28 Incident and the Christian community contributes not only to a deeper understanding of the social role of Christianity in modern China, but also to a fuller appreciation of the historical content and multiple dimensions of Christian indigenization. It provides, moreover, an analytically productive perspective from which to explore the complex interactions among religion, nationalism, and social transformation in modern China.

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