

# Research on the Japanese Red Cross Society during Wartime (1931-1945)

-- Focused on the Training of Nursing Personnel

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**Abstract:** The modern aggression wars launched by Japan against China have left indelible humiliating memories for the Chinese nation. During the aggression wars from 1931 to 1945, with the expansion of the war, more and more Japanese groups and organizations were mobilized to participate in the war. This paper selects the Japanese Red Cross Society for research, specifically discussing the measures taken by this organization in the training of nursing personnel, analyzing the connection between the nursing personnel training model of the Japanese Red Cross Society and the overall national strategy of Japan during that period, and the role played by this organization in the war.

**Keywords:** Modern Japan, Japanese Red Cross Society, Nursing Personnel.

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## 1. Overview of the Japanese Red Cross Society

The predecessor of the Japanese Red Cross Society was a civilian aid group called the Philanthropic Society, founded during the Southwestern Rebellion in 1877. The Philanthropic Society, modeled after the civilian rescue organizations operated by European nobility, was proposed on April 6, 1877, by Tsunetami Sano, a member of the House of Elders, and Yuzuru Ogyu, with a request to Count Tomomi Iwakura. However, this application was rejected on April 23 with the reasoning that establishing a new rescue organization would cause confusion at the scene of aid for the wounded, given that the existing rescue system was already well-established. Afterward, Sano traveled across Kyushu and Kyoto, attempting to gain the emperor's close officials' favor unsuccessfully. Finally, Sano went to Kumamoto and applied to Prince Arisugawanomiya, the then General Governor of the Kumamoto battlefield, and was granted permission on May 1, allowing the establishment of Japan's first civilian wartime aid group. In 1886, the Philanthropic Society joined the Geneva Convention and was renamed the "Japanese Red Cross Society" the following year, marking its official debut on the historical stage.

## 2. Activities of the Japanese Red Cross Society during the war

### 2.1. The Philanthropic Society's Five Charters

As the predecessor of the Japanese Red Cross Society, the Philanthropic Society, at its inception, drafted the "Philanthropic Society Charter" inspired by the 1864 Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field. This original charter consisted of five articles, where the first three addressed the organization's stance during wartime, sources of activity funds, and the use of identity symbols by members in activities. The fourth and fifth articles briefly explained the activities of the Philanthropic Society and its relationship with

the government: the organization's activities were to provide rescue and nursing care for the wounded during wartime, adhering to government regulations and following the commands of the army and navy medical chiefs. Following its recognition during the Southwestern Rebellion, the Philanthropic Society immediately entered into an agreement with the military medical corps about the rescue mission, outlining the respective responsibilities during rescue operations. Although the Southwestern Rebellion ended in September of the same year and the Philanthropic Society's contribution to battlefield aid for the wounded wasn't significant during the war, the cooperative relationship formed with the military was subsequently maintained. The agreement preliminarily stipulated the sharing of rescue expenses between the Philanthropic Society and the army during wartime, providing food, shelter, and clothing to the medical personnel of the Philanthropic Society according to military medical standards. This collaborative relationship between rescue organizations and the military, which reappeared in various wars later, was initially formed during the Southwestern Rebellion. With the military funding and providing conveniences such as transportation, the Philanthropic Society, and later the Japanese Red Cross Society, was able to participate in wartime rescue operations with less financial pressure. However, this also led to a transformation in its nature. The Red Cross, originally intended to be a neutral organization, came under military surveillance, followed military orders, and became an accomplice in Japan's external aggressions due to its close step with the military.

### 2.2. The Activity Charter of the Japanese Red Cross Society

Building on the Philanthropic Society's five charters, the Japanese Red Cross Society further refined its organizational duties in the "Japanese Red Cross Society Charter" formulated in 1887, after making adjustments. The original fourth article was incorporated into the first article of the Japanese Red Cross charter, stating the organization's purpose

as "to rescue and nurse wounded and sick soldiers in wartime to alleviate their suffering." Additionally, the charter specified in its fourth article the work required during wartime and peacetime, highlighting the necessity of collecting materials and training medical and nursing personnel in non-war times to prepare for wartime adequately. Furthermore, in the "Amendment to the Japanese Red Cross Society Charter" published in 1898, the government added the duties the Red Cross needed to fulfill during natural disasters and emphasized "to ensure the Red Cross can effectively function when rescue is needed, hospitals will be established as necessary institutions for fulfilling such duties." Guided by these charters, the Japanese Red Cross established multiple branch offices nationwide, turning the hospitals in those locations into training bases for medical and nursing personnel, thereby cultivating a significant workforce for the nation and military.

### **3. Training of Nursing Personnel by the Japanese Red Cross**

According to the Red Cross charter and the "Japanese Red Cross Society Nursing Personnel Training Regulations" established on June 14, 1889, the society began training medical and nursing personnel in 1890 using military land borrowed from Tokyo Prefecture. The Japanese Red Cross also established branch offices in various locations, training batches of medical personnel who would later actively participate in the First Sino-Japanese War, Russo-Japanese War, World War I, and World War II, serving as a support force for the military and aiding Japan's external wars of aggression.

#### **3.1. Early Education Philosophy of the Japanese Red Cross**

Since its inception, the Japanese Red Cross Society has maintained uniqueness in its nursing personnel training efforts. From the early charters and regulations published by the society, it is evident that the top management and related personnel of the society placed great emphasis on the role these nursing personnel could play during wartime. In 1892, during the graduation ceremony of the first and second batches of medical and nursing trainees trained by the Japanese Red Cross Society, Tsunetami Sano, founder of the Philanthropic Society and the Japanese Red Cross Society, delivered a speech. In his speech, he emphasized that the medical and nursing personnel trained by the society should, on the foundation of the philanthropic and charitable qualities essential to all medical personnel, also possess the spirit of willingness to sacrifice and serve the country. He cited Florence Nightingale as an example, praising her contributions as a military nurse during the Crimean War and instilling in the nursing students the necessity of military rescue and dedication to the country.

The medical care system of the Japanese Red Cross Society, in its early stages, was rooted in the Japanese ethos of loyalty and patriotism, which became an unstable factor in the action guidelines of the Japanese Red Cross Society. Moreover, with the military and the top management of the Japanese Red Cross Society vigorously promoting and propagating this ethos, the action principles of the Japanese Red Cross Society deviated from the original intent of the international Red Cross movement, further straying from the Geneva Conventions as war approached.

#### **3.2. Ideological Education of the Japanese Red Cross Society**

The initial charter of the Japanese Red Cross Society specified the wartime relationship between the society, the imperial family, and the military: "The Japanese Red Cross Society is protected by the Emperor and Empress, and the president of the Red Cross Society is also a member of the imperial family," "The activities of the society must follow the intentions of the Emperor and Empress and are subject to the supervision of the Imperial Household Ministry and the Ministry of the Army and Navy." Combining this with Sano's speech emphasizing "loyalty to the nation" and his praise for the virtues of "devotion, endurance, and sacrifice," it can be said that the education provided to the students under the Japanese Red Cross Society directly or indirectly imbued them with imperial worship and the ideology of loyalty to the emperor. After prolonged exposure to such ideological education, by the time World War II broke out and Japan embarked on the path of militarism, the Japanese Red Cross Society naturally deviated from the Geneva Conventions, prioritizing national service as its foremost principle and fully supporting the war.

Especially after the "May 15 Incident" in 1932, which resulted in the assassination of Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi, party politics came to an end, and the "national unity" cabinet led by Admiral Saito Makoto was established. From this point, the military seized power, leading to the "February 26 Incident" in 1936 and further development of Japanese militarism, eventually leading to the comprehensive war of aggression against China. During this period, the military's control over national ideology also intensified. As an organization closely related to the imperial family and the army and navy, the Japanese Red Cross Society's educational content for medical and nursing personnel during this time took on increasingly significant tones of militarism.

In May 1934, a special education course opened at the headquarters of the Japanese Red Cross Society, featuring content taught by the head of the Special Higher Police (Tokko), responsible for the course Table 1. From the name of the course, it is apparent that its focus was on ideological education, particularly regarding "ideological issues." The "Special Higher Police," an institution involved in espionage and intelligence gathering during the war of aggression against China, naturally did not focus on explaining the spirit or history of the Red Cross through its course. Comparing the "ideological issues" of concern to the state at the time and the government's actions, the Table 2 can be derived:

This Table 2 shows that when the Japanese Red Cross Society launched its special education course in 1934, the military's most significant concern and fear regarding "ideological issues" was the "communization" of the populace, fearing the influence of communist ideology on the people and the potential destabilization of military rule. According to reports from the Asahi Shinbun during this period, the main activities of the Tokko head Mouri from 1932 to 1937 were denunciations of Japanese Communist Party members, and he was directly involved in the "Takiji Kobayashi incident." Thus, the involvement of such a staunch supporter of militarism in the education of Red Cross Society students clearly aimed to cultivate a group of medical personnel who could implement the ideology of loyalty to the emperor and meet the nation's wartime needs.

**Table 1.** Special Education Course for Society Rescue Workers by the Japanese Red Cross Society

<b>Special Education Course for Society Rescue Workers by the Japanese Red Cross Society (May 2-11, 1934)</b>	
Red Cross Spirit	Vice President Nakagawa
Evolution of Red Cross Activities and Nursing History	Chief Takahashi of the Relief Department
Wartime Relief and Disaster Aid	Deputy Counselor Tsutsumi
Peacetime Activities	Deputy Counselor Hashizume
Relief Materials	Deputy Counselor Isobe
History of Japanese Red Cross Society Nurses and Their Training	Consultant Kobayashi
About the International Red Cross Conference	Chief Investigator Inoue
Overview of Hospital Management	Chief of the Finance Department Nanjo
Essentials of Moral Education	Consultant Ogawa
Social Work	Consultant Ikue
On Ideological Issues	Judicial Secretary Otake
On the Control of Ideological Issues	Head of the Tokko, Mori
Red Cross and Army Regulations and Sanitary Service	Third Class Medical Officer Mizuno
Red Cross and Navy Regulations and Sanitary Service	Lieutenant Commander Imada
Protection against Poison Gas and Emergency Treatment and Air Transport of Patients	Second Class Medical Officer Nakamura
Education in Academic Subjects and Research and Exchange of Opinions across Disciplines	Hospital Director Fujinami
Research and Exchange of Opinions on the Work of Nurses and Students	Training Supervisor Hirooka

**Table 2.** Events and government's actions

<b>Events</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Actions</b>
	1931.6.23	Establishment of the Student Ideological Issues Investigation Committee by the Ministry of Education
Mukden Incident	1931.9.18	
May 15 Incident	1932.5.15	
	1932.8.23	Establishment of the National Spirit and Culture Research Institute
Nagano Prefecture Teachers' Communist Incident	1933.2.4	
Arrest and torture to death of Takiji Kobayashi by the Special Higher Police	1933.2.20	
	1934.6.1	Establishment of the Ideological Bureau (Ideological Section, Investigation Section)

### 3.3. Development of Medical Personnel Training System by the Japanese Red Cross Society

To better train medical and nursing personnel, the Japanese Red Cross Society established a central hospital at its headquarters in 1886 and subsequently set up multiple branches. By the end of 1933, it had successfully trained over 12,000 medical personnel and had 1,360 students. However, despite the significant number of medical and nursing personnel trained by the Japanese Red Cross Society during the preparatory period for war, the expansion of the Second Sino-Japanese War and the increasing casualties among rescue workers on the battlefield highlighted the pressing need to address the shortage of personnel. Therefore, the training model and selection criteria for medical personnel began to change to meet the demand, with accelerating the training cycle and lowering the recruitment standards for nursing personnel being the most direct measures.

In the early Showa era, the standard for recruiting students by the Red Cross Society was women aged 17 to 25, healthy, ideologically firm, and female high school graduates. The training cycle for medical rescue was three years, and graduates were obligated to respond to Red Cross Society calls and participate in wars and natural disaster relief for 12

years after graduation. After the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, recruitment requirements were relaxed in response to real needs, introducing new training models and types of nursing personnel. Medical personnel not formally trained by the Japanese Red Cross Society also began to be called up for military service. After undergoing a brief, approximately 8-week temporary training, they were awarded the title of temporary rescue workers and participated in wartime treatment. This approach leaned more towards a special organization of existing medical personnel during wartime rather than a fundamental change in student development methods. Additionally, the temporary awarding of informal military medical personnel status was considered by some management members within the system to potentially disrupt the existing medical personnel rank system. As a result, the Japanese Red Cross Society continued to adjust its development policies, introducing a "Type B" training model distinct from the original training method.

The "Type B" training model for rescue personnel was officially initiated by the Japanese Red Cross Society in 1941 after revising its existing training regulations in 1940, distinguishing it from the original 3-year "Type A" teaching model. Besides reducing the study period to 2 years, the recruitment standards for "Type B" were also lowered compared to "Type A". The educational requirements for "Type B" enrollment were reduced from high school diplomas

to higher elementary school diplomas, and the age range was adjusted to 14-20 years. Due to the shorter education period, the curriculum was also streamlined, focusing on skill development. The teaching of "Type B" emphasized skill development, including basic language education and ideological education, with all other content focused on rescue skills and health knowledge. Courses on music, gymnastics, psychology, and other aspects of emotional and personality development included in the "Type A" education were eliminated, aiming to educate loyal and patriotic personnel for national use within a shorter time frame.

### **3.4. Skill Development for Medical Personnel of the Japanese Red Cross Society**

In terms of training medical and nursing personnel, the Japanese Red Cross Society, guided by the principle of "serving the country," placed great emphasis on the practicality of ideological and skill education. In 1937, a document from the Japanese Red Cross Society's headquarters to Morioka Red Cross Hospital specified the training for temporarily recruited medical and nursing students. During the second and third semesters of the training period, students were required to undergo six months of practical training. The teaching content and skills developed were targeted, including basic conduct education and dissemination of Red Cross-related knowledge. The main learning content for students included human anatomy and its functional principles, bandage application, sterilization methods, nursing methods, treatment and surgical assistance skills, massage techniques, use of medical instruments, pharmacology and drug formulation, patient transportation methods, emergency treatment of injuries, and treatment of infectious diseases and other illnesses. Additionally, considering the potential conditions and types of injuries and diseases on the battlefield, special education on battlefield injuries, war-related diseases, and gas injuries was provided. The ultimate goal of this skill development was to enable these trained medical and nursing personnel to maximize their effectiveness on the battlefield and contribute to the ongoing war.

## **4. The Role of Medical Personnel Trained by the Japanese Red Cross Society in the War**

### **4.1. Formation of Rescue Teams for Treatment**

During wartime, the primary task of the Japanese Red Cross Society was to provide medical aid to wounded soldiers. Following the outbreak of the "Mukden Incident" in 1931, the "Japanese Red Cross Society Manchuria Committee" immediately began organizing medical rescue teams. Although this temporary rescue team formation was somewhat hurried compared to the rescue personnel organization ordered by the Minister of the Army in November of the same year, it still played a significant role, assisting 195 wounded and 510 sick individuals by the end of October. Meanwhile, the Red Cross Society's headquarters in Japan, located behind the front lines, also took action, calling up a large number of medical personnel from branches across Japan to form rescue teams and rush to the battlefield to provide medical treatment to injured soldiers. Influenced by the personnel training and ideological education during the preparatory period for war, the Japanese Red Cross Society,

under the direction of the military, became a subordinate organization of military doctors and actively participated in the war as a support force.

### **4.2. Propaganda**

Medical and nursing personnel, mostly women, received extensive media coverage for their involvement in wartime medical and nursing efforts. Their spirit of sacrificing for the country and enthusiasm for military medical rescue became excellent material for official propaganda to promote the war, having a strong inciting effect on the civilian population behind the front lines, further fueling the nationalistic fervor for militarism.

Moreover, Japan's domestic propaganda consistently adhered to the notion of the "Greater East Asia Holy War," with mainstream media reports involving the Japanese Red Cross Society's participation in the war often conveying approval and praise. While these reports superficially commended the compassionate spirit of the rescue workers, they essentially glorified and legitimized the war. In promoting the "virtue" of "active dedication" of the caregivers, these reports were accompanied by a series of news articles that denigrated the Chinese people's resistance to foreign aggression as barbaric and immoral. The contempt and negation of China evident in these reports deliberately created a contrast between Japan and China, tarnishing the reputation of the Chinese populace, indoctrinating the Japanese people with the "justifiability" of the aggression, and stimulating their loyalty to the emperor and enthusiasm for participating in the war. Additionally, the effective aid provided by medical personnel to wounded soldiers on the front lines increased the survival rate of soldiers, allowing a group of treated soldiers to return to the battlefield, while another group of returned soldiers became a propaganda force for the military, creating a cycle of war resources between the home front and the front lines. The Japanese Red Cross Society's rescue activities during this period became a supporting force for the ongoing war.

Furthermore, at the onset of the Second Sino-Japanese War, Japanese Red Cross Society medical personnel in the northeast region, in addition to fulfilling their rescue duties, also conducted nationwide broadcasts through the Shenyang Radio Station at the time. However, the broadcast content only covered the hardships faced by military medical personnel working under harsh conditions, without conveying a sense of the impending crisis brought about by the war. Considering the subordinate relationship between the Japanese Red Cross Society and the military during the war, the message delivered by this broadcast propaganda naturally had its purposes, intentionally creating a false sense of calm to cover up the crimes committed during the war.

## **5. Conclusion**

The Japanese Red Cross Society originated during the Southwestern Rebellion period, founded based on the development of war and national needs, and gradually perfected its system and medical personnel training model with the evolution of the era. Given the special relationship between the Japanese Red Cross Society and the military, the training of nursing personnel during wartime began to change. During World War II, when there was a shortage of rescue personnel on the front lines, emergency personnel were quickly mobilized from the rear, and adjustments were made to the training system, adopting measures such as reducing

the training period and eliminating unnecessary courses for battlefield rescue. On the one hand, these measures catered to the war's demands in actual skill development, and on the other hand, they aligned with the ideological guidelines of wartime national aggression, integrating the spirit of loyalty to the emperor and dedication to the country into the training of wartime rescue personnel. Under the influence of the military, the Japanese Red Cross Society gradually deviated from its course, becoming an auxiliary organization for the war and a perpetrator of external aggression.

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