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Evolution of the social relief system in late Qing and its impacts

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ABSTRACT

The Chinese social relief system, first established in the eighteenth century, had already faced enormous pressure during the late Qing period. Impacted by the West and galvanized by China's domestic social transformation, however, the Chinese social relief system embarked on some new development unseen before, including diversified famine relief mechanisms, socialization of famine relief granaries, and the development of inclusive philanthropy. The above development is a testament to the fact that the social relief system of late Qing gradually moved away from the old, state-dominated model and became an integral part of the social transformation in modern China.

KEYWORDS

Social relief; social transformation; charitable donation; charity granary; Late Qing period

In the modern era, social relief refers to all kinds of reliefs provided by the state and society to those who have difficulty in maintaining the basic standard of living due to natural disasters or other reasons. Social relief, a modern concept, can actually be traced back to the ancient era in China mainly in the forms of famine relief, charity granaries and charity events as reflected in the Confucian classic *Rites of the Zhou*. Inheriting the accumulated experience of hundreds of years in social relief, the Qing rulers put in place a well-designed social relief system after they took over China. Existing studies recognize the important function of this social relief system in promoting development and maintaining social stability and unification of China after the eighteenth century. It shrank in tandem with China's decline during the late Qing dynasty, but did not atrophy or wither away. Under the influence of the West and in response to the domestic needs of China's social transformation, social relief in late Qing embarked on some new developments unseen before, including diversified famine relief mechanisms, socialization of famine relief granaries, and the development of inclusive philanthropy. We now turn to these three aspects for more detailed analysis.

Diversified famine relief mechanisms

In Chinese history, the state-dominated famine relief system has long been at the central stage of famine relief efforts. It incrementally improved since the Qin and Han dynasties, and such a development continued in the Qing dynasty. In particular, famine relief system got extraordinary development during the reigns of Emperors

Kangxi, Yongzheng and Qianlong, the heyday of the Qing dynasty. As one researcher argues, “famine relief system in the Qing dynasty reached the climax in traditional China” and it was featured with well-designed relief measures, expanding relief expenditure and considerably high relief capability.¹ Such a positive evaluation was echoed by some overseas researchers. For example, Pierre-Etienne Will, a French scholar, examined the famine relief measures in the Zhili region in the early days of Qianlong’s reign and concluded that the famine relief institutions and procedures created in the eighteenth century “still represented an effective governance model,” which shed light on the overall famine relief policy of that time.² Even under the pressure of population expansion, increasing man-land ratio and multiplied difficulties in livelihood in the eighteenth century, the Qing government largely maintained national unity and social stability, an achievement that would be impossible without the social safety role of the famine relief system. In contrast, civilian organizations could hardly launch large-scale famine relief campaigns on their own during the High Qing era. Instead, they remained subordinate to official famine relief organizations and played a complementary role.

With the noticeable decline of the Qing Empire since the late eighteenth century, the state-dominated famine relief model became increasingly unsustainable. Against this background, the official famine relief system became bifurcated. On the one hand, the Qing government took pains to sustain the official famine relief system in important regions like Beijing and its surrounding areas as well as some economically backward regions. Noticeable examples include the flood relief efforts in the Zhili region in the sixth year of Emperor Jiaqing’s reign and the third year of Emperor Daoguang’s reign and the drought relief efforts in Gansu in the 15th year of Emperor Jiaqing’s reign. On the other hand, the Qing government increasingly delegated famine relief responsibilities to social forces in economically developed areas like the Jiangnan region, where a disaster relief system jointly managed by the state and the society gradually took shape. Such a system played a substantial role in the drought relief efforts in the Jiangnan region in the 19th year of Emperor Jiaqing’s reign and in the flood relief efforts in the Jiangnan region both in the third year and the 29th year of Emperor Daoguang’s reign. Generally speaking, the official famine relief system became less effective in the first half of the nineteenth century, although the state still managed to maintain its dominance in famine relief efforts.

The famine relief capability of the Qing government declined remarkably in the second half the nineteenth century, especially after the decade-long Taiping Rebellion. For example, in the fifth year of Emperor Xianfeng’s reign, when the grand rerouting of the Yellow River happened after a burst at Tongwaxiang of Henan Province, the Qing court was bogged down in wars and almost did nothing to alleviate the disaster situation in Henan.³ In the tenth year of Emperor Tongzhi’s reign, The Zhili region was hit hard by a huge flood on par with the flood of the sixth year of Emperor Jiaqing’s reign in terms of severity. However, the government was far from able to supply sufficient relief resources. Consequently, Li Hongzhang, the Governor-General of Zhili, had to lower relief standards in order to lessen the burden on state finance.⁴ A more formidable challenge was the extreme drought that hit North China

¹Li Xiangjun, *Qingdai huangzheng yanjiu*, 191-193.

²Will, *18 shiji Zhongguo de guanliao*, “Preface,” 223.

³Jia Guojing, *Huanghe Tongwaxiang juekou gaidao*, 47.

⁴Li, *Fighting Famine in North China*, 268-272.

between the third (1877) and the fifth (1879) year of Emperor Guangxu's reign, known in Chinese as the "Dingwu qihuang" (the devastating famines of 1877 and 1878). Although the Qing court and local governments spared no effort to cope with the ensuing devastating famines, the effectiveness of these measures was not satisfying given a significant death toll of around ten million people.⁵ It was under such circumstances that China's official famine relief system was inevitably challenged by unofficial forces.

The first unofficial challenge came from civilian disaster relief efforts. As a form of local disaster relief arrangement, civilian disaster relief was popular in the Jiangnan region during the reign of Emperors Jiaqing and Daoguang. After the outbreak of the devastating famines around 1877, gentries in the Jiangnan region voluntarily launched a famine relief campaign for the refugees in North China. This relief campaign lasted for more than four years, raising over one million taels of silver and providing reliefs for more than one million refugees in 50-plus counties of Shandong, Henan, Shanxi and Zhili provinces. The scale of this relief campaign was unprecedented in terms of its scale and scope as well as social influence.⁶ The primary reason that it surpassed previous local relief efforts was the development of a well-formed organizational structure. During the four-year relief efforts, diverse social relief forces were gradually integrated together and became effectively organized. Various volunteers and civilian relief organizations communicated and linked with each other and coordinated their actions in fund raising and dispatch of funds, which ensured the smooth implementation of famine relief programs. Moreover, civilian relief efforts during this period introduced some distinctive measures that both followed the reasonable parts of official relief measures and adopted and refined previous experiences in civilian famine relief and philanthropy. In this way, these measures dwarfed past civilian relief campaigns and proved to be more effective than official relief measures in many respects. In particular, they attached great importance to improving people's livelihood to strengthen their capability in withstanding natural disasters. Consequently, the contrast between these new civilian relief efforts and the moribund official relief organizations could not be more marked.

After the outbreak of the devastating famines from 1877 to 1879, civilian relief campaigns rapidly developed into an important disaster relief approach with far-reaching influences during the rest years of the late Qing. The key for this development lied in the fact that many civilian relief campaigners, like Xie Jiafu, Li Jinyong and Jing Yuanshan, among others, became important managers of westernized companies in China under the patronage of important political figures like Li Hongzhang and Sheng Xuanhuai. Thanks to the increasing reputation and productivity of these westernized companies, civilian relief campaigns became more influential and effective and attracted a large number of gentry-businessmen to join. The organizational framework of civilian relief campaigns largely took shape after the ninth year of Emperor Guangxu's reign. Mainly supported by the Shanghai gentry and business circle, these campaigns advocated disaster relief efforts for natural disaster-stricken areas across China. In the following decades, civilian disaster relief campaigns covered numerous disaster-

⁵As for the overall situations and results of the official famine relief efforts, please see He Hanwei, He Hanwei, *Guanxu chunian (1876-1879) huabei*.

⁶See Zhu Hu, *Jiangnanren zai Huabei*, 114-148.

stricken areas from China's Northeast to Guangdong in the far south, and relief donations came from Chinese mainland as well as international communities in Europe, America, Japan and Southeast Asia. One of the leaders of those civilian relief campaign, Jing Yuanshan, confidently said that "there has been an emerging tendency across the country that people would feel they are left out had they not participated in the relief campaigns."⁷ It is fair to say that such trans-local relief campaigns not only greatly expanded the geographic scope of traditional civilian relief efforts but also accomplished intensive social mobilization unprecedented in Chinese history, signaling important changes in the Chinese disaster relief system.⁸

Civilian relief campaigns put the official relief system under huge pressure. Even the Qing government highly recognized the value of civilian relief campaigns. Simply put, civilian relief campaigns were not only recognized but also encouraged by the state. As a result, civilian relief campaigns were further legitimized. Official perceptions about civilian relief campaigns changed considerably in the ninth year of Emperor Guangxu's reign. Many officials began to attach great importance to civilian relief efforts mainly due to their actual effectiveness in famine relief, instead of viewing them as negligible civilian philanthropic activities. These officials either actively called for assistance from civilian relief efforts due to the limits of official relief capability or stressed on the importance of civilian participation in relief campaigns in front of the emperor. A number of influential regional officials went so far as to admit the advantages of civilian relief efforts vis-a-vis official ones and the imperative to count on civilian relief campaigns. One noticeable example happened during the Shaanxi famine in 1900 when the exiled royal court in Xi'an commanded civilians to collect relief resources in the south to supply for relief campaigns in Shaanxi Province since the government was unable to cope with the crisis on its own.⁹ This case indicated that the new, civilian-dominated relief campaigns had been incorporated into the core of the Chinese famine relief system, ridding itself from being merely the auxiliary of official relief campaigns.

Civilian relief campaigns also reshaped the operation of the official relief system. One example here is the so-called "shift from the official way to the civilian one," namely some official relief campaigns adopting the approaches of the civilian ones. To be more specific, this could happen under two scenarios: first, the official authorities freed themselves from the rigid procedures of the official famine relief system and adopted flexible civilian approaches in their relief efforts; second, some local officials appointed or invited civilians to lead the local official relief efforts, and then these civilian leaders made efforts to spread their relief measures. Li Hongzhang was an outstanding example here. During his term as the governor of the Zhili region, Li largely relied on civilians in his famine relief campaigns. Another way that civilian relief efforts influenced the official relief system was through civilian-official joint relief campaigns. One typical example was the flood relief campaign in the Jiangnan region during the 32nd and 33rd years of Emperor Guangxu's reign. Coordinated under a same institutional framework, both the official and the civilian relief efforts were integrated together during this campaign and the official-civilian boundary became blurred consequently. Moreover,

⁷Jing Yuanshan, "Chouzhen tonglun," 217.

⁸See Li Wenhui, "Wanqing yizhen de xingqi," 27-35.

⁹See Zhu Hu, "Difang xipu xiang guojia," 27-38.

such official-civilian joint relief efforts disproportionately counted on the civilian side; in other words, civilian approaches and civilian campaigners played the pivotal role in these joint relief efforts. By overcoming the official-civilian divide, such joint relief efforts gave rise to a set of new relief mechanisms characterized by state-society cooperation.¹⁰ It is fair to say that the example mentioned above was the most successful one during the late Qing period demonstrating the transformation of the official relief system by civilian relief efforts.

Apart from the burgeoning domestic civilian relief campaigns, another development of famine relief during the late Qing period was the emergence of China relief campaigns led by westerners. According to the available sources, the first China relief campaign initiated by the West took place in the 29th year of Emperor Daoguang's reign when the Jiangnan region was hit hard by a huge flood. Since Shanghai was already opened to foreigners, the Jesuit missionaries and other westerners launched famine relief campaigns in Shanghai and its surrounding areas by collecting donations from the West. This was the first organized relief campaign by westerners in China.¹¹ During the devastating famines from 1877 to 1879 in Emperor Guangxu's reign, westerners even launched famine relief campaigns before the Chinese civilian relief efforts started. Taking advantage of their advanced technology, westerners in China quickly spread information on the Chinese famine and relief efforts and established a world-wide relief network. A large number of westerners, including missionaries, businessmen, government officials and ordinary people, were mobilized for this famine relief campaign. According to a report by the Famine Relief Committee, donations from the West totaled 200,000-plus taels of silver and the number of westerners working on the relief front-line reached over 70. They engaged in the relief efforts in more than 30 counties in Shandong, Shanxi, and Zhili provinces. Apart from several diplomats and foreign custom officials employed by the Qing government, most of these westerners were Protestant and Catholic missionaries from the Great Britain and the United States, with Protestant missionaries as the majority.¹² This was the first large-scale famine relief campaign initiated by westerners in inland China, embarking on the start of the profound influences of the West on famine relief in China.

Nevertheless, western disaster relief efforts were largely independent from the Qing government and Chinese civilians from the early days of Emperor Guangxu's reign to the year of 1900. They were even shunned at some disaster-stricken areas. Such a situation only changed after the outbreak of the Japanese-Russian War in 1904. At that time, Chinese and western campaigners jointly launched Shanghai Cosmopolitan Red Cross for relief efforts in the warring areas. This was the first time that the Chinese campaigners in Shanghai substantially cooperated with their western counterparts in disaster relief. In response to the flood in northern Jiangsu in the 32nd year of Emperor Guangxu's reign, Chinese and western campaigners jointly established the China International Famine Relief Commission (Huayang yizhenhui), which operated on the basis of equal cooperation between the Chinese and western sides. It effectively launched many relief campaigns and collected up to 1.25 million Yuan donation during

¹⁰Zhu Hu, *Difangxing liudong jiqi chaoyue*, 444.

¹¹de la Servière, *Jiangnan chuanjiao shi*, vol. 1, 165-183.

¹²Muirhead, *The Great Famine*.

its existence.¹³ Apart from adopting Chinese civilian relief measures, the China International Famine Relief Commission took advantage of the merits of western relief methods and put a set of operation mechanisms in place. It not only realized the intimate cooperation between Chinese relief campaigners and their western counterparts, but also established a new disaster relief system which transcended both the traditional Chinese civilian relief framework and the original disaster relief model adopted by western campaigners in China. In this sense, the China International Famine Relief Commission was a milestone for both China and the West in their disaster relief efforts.

During the Revolution of 1911, the Chinese-Western joint disaster relief system got further improved. In 1910 and 1911, areas in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River were hit hard by several floods. Since China was unfortunately in the throes of political turmoil, none of the late Qing government, the provisional Nanjing government established after the Qing collapse, or the Beijing government headed by Yuan Shikai was able to provide sufficient reliefs to those flood-stricken areas. In the autumn of 1910, some Chinese and western relief campaigners in Shanghai reached the consensus to reestablish the China International Famine Relief Commission. It consistently carried out disaster relief efforts in the chaos of regime change, although it had been reorganized twice before its final cessation of operation in 1913.¹⁴ Compared with the China International Famine Relief Commission during Emperor Guangxu's reign, the new Famine Relief Commission established during this transitional period got some important institutional developments. The new Commission put in place a more sophisticated organizational framework. Apart from the Executive Committee, it further established Public Relations Committee, the Finance Committee, the Procurement Committee, the Disaster Prevention Engineering Committee and the Medical Committee, and so on. What was unchanged, however, was the equal cooperation principle between the Chinese and western sides.¹⁵ Furthermore, the new Commission was more deeply involved in disaster relief efforts in China. In particular, the Chinese and western directors of the new Commission appealed to the principle representatives of both the provisional government in Nanjing and the Qing court during their peace negotiations, asking the governments they respectively represented to do more for the well-being of the Chinese people. In addition, the new Commission appealed directly to Sun Yat-sen, the Provisional President, and Yuan Shikai, President of Republic of China. It also published news commentaries, urging the government to fulfill its responsibilities in disaster relief.¹⁶ All these efforts were testaments to the fact that the China International Famine Relief Commission of that time had been a de facto non-governmental organization in China at the time. It is fair to say that the China International Famine Relief Commission before and immediately after the Revolution of 1911 laid a solid foundation for its future development in the ensuing Republican period.

¹³For the activities of the China International Famine Relief Commission, see *Report of the Central China Famine Relief Fund Committee*. As for the charitable giving statistics, please see "Huayang yizhenhui jingshou juankuan zongshu baogao."

¹⁴Huang Wende, *Fei zhengfu zuzhi yu guoji hezuo*, 29.

¹⁵Central China Famine Relief Committee, *Report and Accounts, From October 1, 1911 to June 30, 1912*, 8-10.

¹⁶Huayang yizhenhui, *Huayang yizhenhui zaizhen wenjian huilu*.

Socialization of famine relief granaries

Traditional Chinese relief granaries can be divided into two categories. The first category was mainly for famine and disaster relief, including the Ever Normal Granary (Changping cang), the Community Granary (She cang) and the Charity Granary (Yi cang). The second category was mainly for special needs of the state, such as the Capital Granary (Jing cang), the General Granary (Tong cang), Regional Riverside Granary (Cao cang), the Military Granary (Ying cang) and the Manchu Granary (Qi cang). Social relief mainly fell within the functions of the first category of granaries. In contrast, the second category of granaries was largely kept at arm's length from the ordinary people considering granaries under the second category generally stored special resources exclusively for the state. As early as during the pre-Qin period, ancient China had started the practice of "storing cereal as a precaution against famine." The Western Han dynasty first established the Ever Normal Granary in Chinese history, resulting in the institutionalization of famine relief granary. New forms of famine relief granaries like the Community Granary and the Charity Granary emerged after the Sui and Tang Dynasties, which further diversified the types of famine relief granaries.

Equipped with the experiences of preceding dynasties, the Qing substantially improved the effectiveness of its famine relief granaries. In the late seventeenth century, when its full control of China was about to realize, the Qing government started a large-scale construction of granaries, most of which were Ever Normal Granaries. Thanks to the relentless efforts of the state, the Qing government successfully maintained a famine relief granary system hosting more than 30 million *dan* of cereal from the early eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century. The significance of this famine relief granary system for the stability of a multi-ethnic Chinese dynasty could not be overrated, as it guaranteed safe cereal supply for the largest population around the world in a pre-modern agrarian society. Pierre-Etienne Will and Wang Guobin gave much credit to the achievements of the famine relief granary system during the Qing dynasty. According to them, the Qing government did not merely attempted to intervene in people's lives, in fact, it succeeded in doing so. Even according to the European standard during the same era, the Qing government still performed very well. Therefore, as both scholars suggest, the fact that China outperform many European countries in certain fields remind us that China's successes, rather than its failures, are very important for us to wisely understand the process of China's entry into the modern world.¹⁷

With the decline of the Qing Empire at the turn of the nineteenth century, its famine relief granary system also faced some headwinds. Since the late years of Emperor Qianlong's reign, the management of famine relief granaries have been plagued by intractable problems. In particular, the granaries could hardly reach the up limit of their storage capacity. Since the system of Ever Normal Granaries was too gigantic to reform, both Emperor Jiaqing and Emperor Daoguang chose to reform the management of the Community Granaries and the Charity Granaries by introducing more resources from the society in a bid to lessen the financial and administrative burdens of the

¹⁷Will, and Wong, *Nourish the People*, 498, 524.

government. Such policy shift was most evident in the efforts promoted by Tao Shu, Lin Zexu and others to reform the Charity Granary System in Anhui, Jiangsu and Hubei provinces under the principle of “state initiative, social sponsorship” during the reign of Emperor Daoguang. However, the ensuing decade-long Taiping Rebellion wreaked havoc on large parts of China. Most famine relief granaries were either destroyed or diverted for military purposes and their stock was almost depleted. As a result, the gigantic famine relief granary system of the Qing government was left in tatters. This is why few scholars have ever paid attention to the state of famine relief granary system in the late Qing period.

In fact, the Qing government did not give up the long-cherished belief of Chinese that food should be the first and foremost necessity, even when faced with domestic turmoil and foreign bullying. Though dwarfed by the its predecessor at the heyday of the Qing Empire, the famine relief granary system in the late Qing period did have some innovative developments. Admittedly, such developments could not bring back the “golden days” of the famine relief granary system due to the decline of the Qing Empire. Instead, they contributed to the emergence of a new cereal storage system building on the experiences of the Charity Granary Reform during the reign of Emperor Daoguang and leaned more on the society. The new system got the bulk of its resources from civilian donations, both voluntary and involuntary, and introduced a management model characterized by “gentry’s operation under official supervision.”¹⁸ Under the guidance of the government, there were three consecutive large-scale civilian cereal accumulation campaigns from the early years of Emperor Tongzhi’s reign to 1900 during the reign of Emperor Guangxu. Thanks to such cereal accumulation campaigns jointly launched by the government and the civilians, the famine relief granary system in the late Qing period made considerable achievements. With the government’s increasing dependency on social forces, civilian-sponsored famine relief granaries also cropped up. Both the cereal accumulation campaigns and the development of civilian-sponsored famine relief granaries contributed to the socialization tendency of famine relief granaries in the late Qing period, a development never seen in the early or middle stages of the Qing dynasty.

The first cereal accumulation campaign took place during the reign of Emperor Tongzhi. To meet the demands for cereal from both the military and the civilian, the Provincial Government of Hunan urged local governments to encourage cereal donations in the first year of Emperor Tongzhi’s reign, embarking on the cereal accumulation campaigns in the late Qing period. Urged by Yun Shilin, then the provincial governor of Hunan, the province had accumulated over 610,000 *dan* of cereal by the third year of Emperor Tongzhi’s reign. Thereafter the Qing court ordered provincial governors across the country to improve the management of famine relief granaries several times. Consequently, cereal accumulation campaigns were launched in more places in China. For example, Jiangsu Province started to set aside a certain amount of social donations for relief granaries in the fourth year of Emperor Tongzhi’s reign. Ding Richang, the then provincial governor of Jiangsu, ordered local governments to follow the model of the cereal accumulation campaign in Qingpu County and this effort paid off handsomely. Local governments in Songjiang, Suzhou, Changzhou and Taicang

¹⁸Wu Siwu, *Qingdai cangchu de zhidu kunjing*, 135.

prefectures in particular collected several hundreds of thousands of *dan* of cereal and a large amount of donation money earmarked for cereal purchase. In Jiangxi Province, 14 prefecture governments collected a total of 400,000 *dan* of cereal between the eighth year of Emperor Tongzhi's reign and the first year of Emperor Guangxu's reign. Fujian Province collected up to 200,000 *dan* of cereal during the same period. Provinces like Sichuan, Shandong, Zhejiang and Anhui also collected considerable amount of cereal during Emperor Tongzhi's reign. However, the overall performance of famine relief granary reform during Emperor Tongzhi's reign was mediocre to say the least. This was largely due to the reality that large-scale wars barely ended in some places while sporadic wars still continued in other places.

The second cereal accumulation campaign was a response to the devastating famines from 1877 to 1879. The Qing government was shocked to the core when famines engulfed many parts of North China and refugees struggled to survive. In response, many officials and intellectuals suggested to improve the famine relief granary system. Frequently urged by the Qing court and shocked by the devastating famines in places under their jurisdiction, provincial governments across the country launched a large-scale cereal accumulation campaign, which was even bigger than the first cereal accumulation campaign during the reign of Emperor Tongzhi. This campaign was comparatively more successful in the provinces in the south. In Jiangsu, both Shen Baozhen and Wu Yuanbing, the Governor-General of the Liangjiang Region and the Governor of Jiangsu respectively, earnestly supported the cereal accumulation campaign. Their efforts paid off handsomely: in southern Jiangsu, where considerable amount of cereal had been accumulated during Emperor Tongzhi's reign, things continued to improve for the better; even in places like Jiangning and northern Jiangsu, where only limited amount of cereal had been accumulated in the past, things improved considerably. Many prefectures and counties of Jiangning and northern Jiangsu saw their accumulated cereal up to 10,000 *dan*. In Zhejiang, Ren Daorong, the then deputy provincial governor, urged counties to accumulate cereal and he even proposed the standard amounts of cereal that a small, medium-sized and big country should accumulate respectively. For example, prefectures and counties under Hangzhou's jurisdiction accumulated more than 360,000 *dan* of cereal alone. In Sichuan, Ding Baozhe, the then governor, ordered local governments to accumulate cereal. Local counties frequently sent back positive reports the next year, accumulating over 550,000 *dan* of cereal altogether. Sichuan launched another two similar cereal accumulation campaigns later, accumulating more than 450,000 *dan* of cereal. In Yunnan, the provincial government started to urge local governments to accumulate cereal at the 10th year of Emperor Guangxu's reign. By the 24th year of Emperor Guangxu's reign, the province had collected considerable amounts of money and cereal. Hit hard by devastating famines, provinces in North China spared no effort to accumulate cereal on their own. In the Zhili region, Ren Daorong, the then deputy governor, drafted a charter in the fifth year of Emperor Guangxu's reign, which was endorsed by Li Hongzhang, the then governor-general. According to the charter, big counties must accumulate 10,000 *dan* of cereal, medium-sized counties 6000 *dan*, small counties 4000 *dan*, and the smallest county 2000 *dan*. A report of the next year showed that more than 70 percent of counties finished their respective targets. In Henan, Tu Zongying, the then governor, urged local governments to accumulate cereal and more

than 970,000 *dan* of cereal was collected as a result. In Shandong, the provincial government first urged local governments to accumulate cereal in the 7th year of Emperor Guangxu's reign and collected more than 610,000 *dan* of cereal the next year. In Shaanxi, over 800,000 *dan* of cereal were collected in 91 prefectures and counties during the sixth year and the seventh year of Emperor Guangxu's reign. It was this period that witnessed the most effective cereal accumulation in the late Qing period.

The third cereal accumulation campaign happened during the Hundred Days' Reform. While Emperor Guangxu was devoted to political reform, some senior officials were more concerned with the management of famine relief granaries. In the March of the 24th year of Emperor Guangxu's reign, Gangyi, then a secretary of the Grand Council, bombarded the ineffective management of famine relief granaries and proposed detailed solutions in his report to the emperor. Galvanized by Gangyi's report, the royal court sent a directive to all provinces, urging them to accumulate cereal. In June the same year, a Censor-in-chief, Han Peisen, appealed to the emperor to accumulate cereal, which received similar positive responses from the court. In September, Sheng Xuanhuai submitted to the emperor a proposal in which he urged the royal government to accumulate cereal in order to strengthen the foundation of the empire. The royal court heeded Sheng's advice and ordered provinces across the country to implement it. Also in the same month, the royal court ordered provincial governments to faithfully fulfill their responsibilities in cereal accumulation, neighborhood administration and training of local militias. In November, the royal court issued another two directives, urging provinces to report their handling of the cereal accumulation issue. However, cereal accumulation was a mission impossible for the Qing government at a time when it faced huge financial pressure after its defeat in the first Sino-Japanese War. In response to the directives from the royal court, provinces across the country could only manage to take stock of the already accumulated cereal in granaries, but their efforts did not pay off. Only several provinces reported increasing stock of cereal. For example, Sichuan reported 1.49 million *dan* of cereal by the end of the 25th year of Emperor Guangxu's reign. Although this number declined later due to disaster relief efforts, it still stood at 1.48 million *dan* in the 27th year of Emperor Guangxu's reign. Shaanxi reported 750,000 *dan* of cereal by the end of the 24th year of Emperor Guangxu's reign, slightly lower than the stock level in earlier years of Emperor Guangxu's reign. The Zhili Region reported over 240,000 *dan* of cereal by the end of the 24th year of Emperor Guangxu's reign and this number rose to more than 390,000 *dan* in early days of the 26th year of Emperor Guangxu's reign, thanks to the cereal purchased by local governments. Much more provinces could not maintain their previous levels of cereal stock, however. For example, Hunan reported only 380,000 *dan* of cereal, a sharp decrease of 1.17 million *dan* compared with the previous stock level. In Guangdong, the cereal stock merely stood at around 300,000 *dan*, a large bulk of which had gone moldy. Henan reported only 240,000 *dan* after years of deletion. The cereal stock level of Jiangxi declined to only 50,000 *dan*, a far cry from its expected target at 1.39 million *dan*. Zhejiang was also mired in extremely low level of cereal stock, with mere 30,000 *dan* in stock. Cereal accumulation policy was only implemented erratically in provinces like Shandong and Gansu, both of which reported dangerously low level of cereal stock after years of negligence. In such provinces like Guizhou,

local officials only paid lip service and scrambled to avoid blame. This assessment campaign marked that the cereal accumulation campaigns in late Qing period had lost their steam, and more importantly, the capability of the state to manage famine relief granaries was further curtailed.¹⁹

The socialization of famine relief granaries during the late Qing period was also reflected in the rapid development of civilian-sponsored granaries like the Charity Granaries. Previous studies on relief granaries in the early and mid-Qing dynasty tended to combine the Community Granaries and Charity Granaries together and call them “the Civilian Granaries (Min cang).” This is why some researchers view the development of the Community Granaries and Charity Granaries as an indication of the development of civilian-sponsored granaries. As a matter of fact, however, the Community Granaries and Charity Granaries during the early and mid-Qing dynasty were largely under the government’s control, leaving very little space for the civil society to play its role. It was not until the intensive cereal accumulation campaigns during the reigns of Emperor Tongzhi and Emperor Guangxu that the civil society started to have a bigger say in the management of famine relief granaries. In the name of Charity Granary, famine relief granaries primarily managed by civilians mushroomed. In places like the Jiangnan region and Guangdong, civilian-managed charity granaries achieved remarkable development. Some big charity granaries even became a significant part in local affairs.

The most representative among civilian-managed relief granaries in the Jiangnan region was the Fengbei Charity Granary of Suzhou’s Changzhou, Yuanhe and Wuxian Counties which was rebuilt in the fifth year of Emperor Tongzhi’s reign. Originally a government-managed granary during Emperor Daoguang’s reign, the Fengbei Charity Granary later became co-managed by civilians and the government, with the gentries taking more responsibilities. Its new charter was mainly drafted by local gentries and endorsed by the local government. Based on existing operational procedures of charity granaries, the Fengbei Charity Granary particularly prioritized farm land purchase, rent collection, and lending money to merchants to collect interests. Moreover, the Fengbei Charity Granary had a stable and competent management staff that guaranteed its outstanding performance. During the late years of Emperor Guangxu’s reign, it stored over 120,000 *dan* of cereal and owned 17,000 plus *mu* of farm land, which made it the biggest and most successful charity granary in late Qing China. Its significance even outlived the Qing dynasty and lasted until the Republican period.²⁰ Similar civilian-managed granaries were numerous in the Jiangnan Region. In Jiading County, the local cereal stock granary was integrated with the Charity Granary, altogether ran and managed by local gentries. It stored over 40,000 *dan* of cereal in addition to a large sum of money between its founding during Emperor Tongzhi’s reign and the eighth year of Emperor Guangxu’s reign. The Ningjun Charity Granary in the prefectural city of Jiangning, founded in the late years of Emperor Guangxu’s reign, was managed by local gentries on a rotation basis. Holding to the civilian-run principle, it attracted lots of donations and was renowned for its sound operation. It stored over 10,000 *dan* of cereal and 10,000-plus tael of silver in the third year of Emperor

¹⁹See Zhu Hu’s “Shi wei min tian,” 20-25.

²⁰Wu Siwu, *Qingdai cangchu de zhidu kunjing*, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

Xuantong's reign even after selling its stock of cereal at discounted prices several times. Founded during Emperor Tongzhi's reign, the Charity Granary of Nanhui County was outstanding both in terms of management and performance. By selling its stock of cereal at discounted prices on numerous occasions, this granary contributed enormously to local famine relief efforts.²¹ Another example worthy of mention was the Charity Granaries sponsored by local clans in Jingxi area of Yixing County during the late Qing period, most of which were autonomously operated.²²

During the same period, the development of Charity Granaries in Guangdong was even more radical than that in the Jiangnan Region. Local gentries of Jiaying Prefecture had been dominating the management of the local charity granary since it was rebuilt in the third year of Emperor Guangxu's reign. According to a charter revised in the sixth year of Emperor Guangxu's reign, 11 gentries were responsible for important decision-makings of the granary and another 11 gentries were entrusted to deal with issues related to western medicines. Another gentry, stationed at the granary, was responsible for managing the daily operation of the granary. Financial records of the granary were posted on the wall on a monthly basis to let people know, excluding those government-related financial records which were reported back to the government.²³ The rebuilding of the Charity Granary in Foshan would be impossible without the support from local gentries. The old granary had long been plagued by poor management. Even a granary-owned shop was appropriated by an insider. Thanks to the efforts of a local gentry, Liang Shicheng, this shop was retrieved later. In the 25th year of Emperor Guangxu's reign, Liang asked people to take stock of all the resources in the granary and the resultant catalogue was properly recorded. In the first year of Emperor Xuantong's reign, the granary manager embezzled a large amount of money. Xian Baogan, a local gentry, filed a law suit against the corrupt manager, but it turned out that less than one third of the embezzled money was finally returned. Under the auspice of Xian, the Management Charter of the Granary was revised. The revised charter included six sections and 24 clauses, specifying the rules on selecting the manager, respective responsibilities of the director and the executive director, and public overseeing of the turnover of resources.²⁴ Like in the Yijing area in the Jiangnan Region, in Guangdong, Charity Granaries were most established by local clans with autonomy in management. Generally speaking, the Charity Granaries in Guangdong during the late Qing period was a project gaining much attention from the local gentries.

Development of inclusive philanthropy

The current Chinese term for philanthropy (*cishan*) did not appear early in Chinese history, and it was not until the modern era that it started to refer to charity or philanthropy. Nevertheless, philanthropy-related conceptions and behaviors had long existed in China. In pre-Qin classics like *Shangshu* (The Book of Documents), *Yijing* (The Book of Changes) and *Zhouli* (Rites of the Zhou), there were clear discussions of issues related to good, evil, auspiciousness and ominousness in ancient Chinese society.

²¹Wu Siwu, *Qingdai cangchu de zhidu kunjing*, 159-194.

²²Wu Tao, "Zongzu yu yicang," 56-71.

²³See Chen Chunshen, "Lun Qingmo Guangdong yicang," 50-66.

²⁴*Foshan zhongyixiang zhi*, vol. 7, 1-2.

With the introduction of Buddhism as well as the emergence of Taoism since the Han dynasty, philanthropy-related conceptions and behaviors further developed in China. In other words, China enjoys a long tradition of philanthropy, and philanthropic activities have long been an integral part of social relief efforts in traditional China. Having said that, there is no consensus on the scope of Chinese philanthropic activities among researchers. Some researchers claim that famine relief efforts are also a part of philanthropic activities. Such a definition is obviously overstretched. As mentioned above, famine relief occupied a unique position in Chinese politics and society, and it has long had a relatively complete and independent system of its own. In a narrower sense, only daily poverty alleviation efforts can be defined as the core of philanthropic activities. As far as the Chinese philanthropy history is concerned, most researchers concentrate on the development of philanthropic organizations. In the same vein, this article also focuses on the trajectories and evolution of philanthropic organizations in China. As for voluntary philanthropic activities initiated by individuals, the academia has yet to produce any seminal study and this article will not touch on this issue.

As is widely known, the history of Chinese philanthropic organizations can trace back to the Northern and Southern Dynasties, mostly promoted by the state in their early stage of development. This state-dominated development model for philanthropic organizations reached its climax in the Northern and Southern Song dynasties. Rulers of the Song dynasty had been committed to social welfare since they came to power. They established many kinds of charity relief organizations like senior and homeless center, orphanage and public cemetery, taking philanthropy in China to another level. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, however, the state became less committed to philanthropy, and philanthropic activities dwindled correspondingly compared to the Song dynasties. In contrast, owing to the popularization of philanthropic ideas and moral education, civilian-sponsored philanthropy thrived between late Ming dynasty and early Qing dynasty. Civilian-sponsored philanthropic organizations, in particular charity organizations, cropped up in most parts of China. Diverse in forms, those organizations concentrated their efforts on poverty relief. Furthermore, after the mid-eighteenth century, population explosion and economic growth in China gave rise to increasingly complex social problems while philanthropic organizations received more prominence and recognition for the important role they played in maintaining social order. This was especially true in the Jiangnan region. Underpinned by vibrant local economy here, running local charity organizations not only became an essential part in local affairs, but also played an important role in local power networks. Hence, the thriving civilian-sponsored philanthropic organizations during the Ming and Qing dynasties marked that the philanthropy system in traditional China had entered a new stage.²⁵

Accompanied with the dramatic social upheavals in the late Qing dynasty, the Chinese philanthropy system could not function the way it previously did. Generally speaking, philanthropic activities during the late Qing period were eclipsed by those in the eighteenth century due to both social and economic decline. Having said that, the philanthropy system during the late Qing period developed many innovative practices under the new circumstances. In this way, China's philanthropy embarked on its

²⁵Zhou Qiuguang, and Zeng Guilin, *Zhongguo cishan jianshi*, Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

transition to a modern and inclusive model. The burgeoning and far-reaching new developments could be found mainly in three fields. First, some local philanthropic organizations expanded their previous narrow focus on small communities by working in partnership with each other to augment their social influences. Second, in response to the emerging problems caused by social transformations in modern China, a group of new types of philanthropic organizations came into being, which greatly broadened the functions of philanthropy in Chinese society. Third, philanthropy of western countries began to have enormous influence on China. The most evident example was the introduction of international philanthropic organizations, like the Red Cross.

During the late Qing period, the tendency of traditional Chinese philanthropic organizations to transcend their previous narrow focus on local communities was most evident in the charity organizations in the Jiangnan region. The first important example was that traditional charity organizations in places like Hangzhou and Shanghai formed a certain kind of association which played a crucial role in local public affairs. Confronted by large-scale reconstruction tasks since the end of the Taiping Rebellion, the previously independent philanthropic organizations in Hangzhou and Shanghai started to work in partnership with each other to meet various social demands under new circumstances. This attempt paved the way for the emergence of the “charity association” (*shanju lianhe ti*) model. Centered on local Charity Societies (*Shanhui*) or Charity Halls (*Shantang*), these charity associations grew steadily during the late Qing period. They not only became gigantic organizations responsible for dealing with issues related to urban administration but also provided the imperative foundation for local autonomy during the late Qing period.²⁶ Another major proof for the trans-local tendency of philanthropic organizations was the big role they played in charitable donations. The first part of this paper has discussed the profound implications of donation campaigns during the late Qing period on the development of diversified famine relief mechanisms. Such donation campaigns would be unimaginable without the social resources provided by these Charity Societies or Charity Halls in the Jiangnan Region in the first place.²⁷ By supporting donation campaigns, these philanthropic organizations expanded the geographic scope of their own activities as well as strengthened their operational capability and social impacts, heralding the arrival of a new development stage for traditional philanthropy.

The trans-local tendency of philanthropic organizations during the late Qing period was also manifested in the “trans-regional activities” of Charity Societies and Charity Halls of the Jiangnan Region in North China, a phenomenon that has largely been ignored by existing studies. In the late Qing period, some Charity Societies and Charity Halls cropped up in North China. Their creation was largely the result of efforts by social forces in the Jiangnan Region. Moreover, they also copied the *modus operandi* of Charity Societies and Charity Halls in the Jiangnan Region. Their presence in North China was first recorded during the devastating famines from 1877 to 1879, when some Jiangnan gentries were involved in relief campaigns in Shandong, Henan and the Zhili Region. Lamenting the weakness of local relief forces, they raised fund to establish some local Charity Societies and Charity Halls by following the Jiangnan model. For example, Jiangnan gentries established the Guangren Hall (*Guangren tang*) in Tianjin in the

²⁶Fuma Susumu, *Zhongguo shanhui shantang shi yanjiu*, 516-518, 600-602.

²⁷Li Wenhai, “Wanqing yizhen de xingqi,” 27-35.

fourth year of Emperor Guangxu's reign. Supported by social forces from the Jiangnan Region, Guangren Hall quickly became a large-scale charity organization on par with those in the Jiangnan region, playing a substantial role in local philanthropic activities. Due to the exemplar role of the Guangren Hall in Tianjin, other places in North China quickly followed suit. With supporting resources from southern China, more "Guangren tang" Charity Hall named after their common prototype in Tianjin successively emerged in the capital Beijing as well as Qingzhou and Laizhou in Shandong Province. This clear line of organizational expansion was a testament to the profound influence of Charity Societies and Charity Halls of the Jiangnan region on North China, which was quite unique in the history of China's philanthropy.²⁸

The second aspect of the institutional transformation of philanthropy during the late Qing dynasty was the multiplied social functions played by a group of new-type philanthropic organizations. Most researchers agree that the main objective of traditional philanthropic organizations during the Ming and Qing dynasties was to carry out social nurturing. Correspondingly, they believe that most activities of traditional philanthropic organizations largely fall within the scope of "nurture" (*yangyu*). However, given the drastic changes in social order and social mentality after China entered the modern era, it was beyond the capability of these traditional, nurture-oriented philanthropic organizations to cope with the numerous rising social problems. As a result, some new types of philanthropic organizations emerged. During the Hundred Days Reform in particular, a list of new philanthropic organizations targeting new social problems cropped up, which expanded the scope of traditional charity. Social organizations like Quitting Opium Support Group, News Reading Group, Anti-Foot Binding Association, Rescue Home for Prostitutes, new-style schools and Public Security Bureau not only had a strong civilian nature but also played a role in enlightening the people and promoting social progress. They became important actors in the burgeoning civil society at the time.²⁹

During the New Policy Reform in the last decade of Qing dynasty, public charity became one important aspect of local autonomous movements, galvanizing the formation of a list of new philanthropic organizations.³⁰ The Philanthropic Education Movement was particularly influential at that time. As a break from the traditional approach that focused on material reliefs, intellectuals during the late Qing dynasty like Chen Zhi and Zheng Guanying advocated empowering the poor people by teaching them skills.³¹ Galvanized by public opinions, the Qing government gradually accepted this new social relief idea of "nurturing and empowering" and encouraged the implementation of policies based on it. As a result, new relief organizations like Skill Training Center (*Gongyi ju*), Education Center (*Jiaoyang ju*) and Skill Learning Center (*Xiyi suo*) were established across the country. Encouraged by the government, the civil society actively engaged in the Philanthropic Education Movement. A myriad of new civilian education organizations emerged in big cities like Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai, and provinces like Zhili, Shandong, Jiangxi, and Fujian.³² Since these new civilian education centers emphasized teaching people skills so that they would make

²⁸Zhu Hu, "Kua difang de difangxing shijian," 33-50.

²⁹Zhu Ying, "Wuxu shiqi minjian cishan," 66-71.

³⁰Zhou Qiuguang, and Zeng Guilin, *Zhongguo cishan jianshi*, 244-247.

³¹Li Xixia, *Zhongguo jindai cishan sixiang yanjiu*, 104-109.

³²Wang Weiping, Huang Hongshan, and Zeng Guilin, *Zhongguo cishan shigang*, 118-124.

a living and became self-reliant, there was a fundamental difference in their mission compared with traditional philanthropic activities.

Another new development in the philanthropy system of the late Qing dynasty was the increasing influence of western philanthropic organizations. Western churches played the primary role in introducing western philanthropy into China. To facilitate their missionary activities, both the Catholic church and the various Protestant churches engaged in philanthropy in China. With the increasing presence of westerners in China after the Opium War, the Christian churches were able to carry out more philanthropic activities. During the late Qing period, the philanthropic activities run by the Church were concentrated in three fields, namely, healthcare, social relief and caring for the children. Philanthropic medical care provided by the Church appeared early in Guangzhou even before the outbreak of the Opium War, and became more frequent and widely accessed after 1840. Apart from coastal cities like Shanghai, Hangzhou and Fuzhou, the Church also provided philanthropic medical services in inland provinces like Jiangxi and Hubei. After the Qing government opened five port cities to westerners, the Church started to provide free education to Chinese children from poor families in earnest. The Church helped establish some first schools in Hong Kong and the five port cities, some of which later becoming the predecessors of famous institutions like the St. John's University in Shanghai and Soochow University.³³ The Church started to provide caring for children after Shanghai was opened to westerners. The French Catholic missionaries established the Holy Baby Society, the first childcare organization in Shanghai. Church-sponsored childcare organizations grew even faster than medical or educational organizations. Infant Caring Facilities and orphanages sponsored by the Church emerged in almost a half of Chinese provinces between 1850s and 1860s.³⁴

Heralded by the philanthropic activities of the Church, more modern western philanthropy organizations made their way to China. The most typical example here was the localization of the Red Cross Society. During the first Sino-Japanese War, some westerners from the Red Cross Hospital went to the battlefield and saved many Chinese lives, which was the first time that Chinese were exposed to the humanitarian nature of the Red Cross. During the Hundred Days Reform, some advocated to establish the Chinese Red Cross Society. During the Siege of the International Legations in 1900, Beijing and Tianjin were in the control of foreign forces while the Qing court was on the run. Against this backdrop, gentries from the Jiangnan region, under the banner of the Red Cross Society, voluntarily went to the warring areas to provide reliefs to refugees, ushering in the history of the Chinese Red Cross. After the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, the Shanghai Cosmopolitan Red Cross was jointly established by Chinese civilians and western missionaries and diplomats, with the aim to save lives on the battlefields. Internationally recognized, the Shanghai Cosmopolitan Red Cross became the predecessor of the Chinese Red Cross. After the Shanghai Cosmopolitan Red Cross was later disbanded, Sheng Xuanhuai and other like-minded persons appealed to the Qing court and proposed to establish the Chinese Red Cross. In 1910, the Qing court approved of establishing the Red Cross of the Qing Empire headed by Sheng Xuanhuai.³⁵ This event marked the official inauguration of the Chinese Red

³³Gu Changsheng, *Chuanjiaoshi yu jindai Zhongguo*, 211-214, 257-264.

³⁴Zhou Qiuguang, and Zeng Guilin, *Zhongguo cishan jianshi*, 348.

³⁵Chi Zihua, *Hongshizi yu jindai Zhongguo*, Chapter 1 and Chapter 2.

Cross. It added fresh elements to the philanthropic system in China and demonstrated the exchanges and integration of the Chinese and western philanthropic cultures.

Concluding remarks

The three pillars in the Chinese social relief system, namely famine relief activities, famine relief granaries, and philanthropic relief, all had some new developments in the late Qing period, which charted a course substantially different from the past. First, the state's dominance in the famine relief system was challenged to the core. The emergence of civil society relief organizations and western disaster relief efforts in China gave rise to new disaster relief mechanisms through which multiple actors, both at home and from abroad, cooperated in relief efforts. As far as famine relief granaries are concerned, although the numerous cereal accumulation campaigns during late Qing period were often initiated by the state, the core parts of them was the joint efforts by the civil society and the government. And as granaries sponsored by civil society organizations made great inroads, the socialization of relief granaries became the order of the day. In the field of philanthropic relief, many new philanthropic organizations emerged during the late Qing period. More capable of responding to new social problems of the time, these organizations learned from the valuable experience of western philanthropic organizations, increasingly transcended the scope of traditional Chinese philanthropy, and showed a tendency towards the public good. All of these transitions highlight the fact that the Chinese social relief system during the late Qing period largely deviated from the traditional state-dominant path and increasingly relied on state-society cooperation and supports from non-official sectors. In this sense, the evolution of the Chinese social relief system during the late Qing period was nothing but an integral part of the social transformation in modern China.

(translated by JIA Yajuan)

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Glossary

Chen Xianshu	陈贤书
chuangong	传供
Dalisi	大理寺
<i>Da Qing lüli</i>	《大清律例》
Duchayuan	都察院
Du Fengzhi	杜风治
<i>fanshi qian</i>	饭食钱
Foshan	佛山
Guangning	广宁
Guangxin tang	广信堂
Hu Guocun	胡国存
Jiang Chaobo	蒋超伯
Jiang Yahua	江亚华
jiu di zheng fa	就地正法
kanyu	看语
Lan Dingyuan	蓝鼎元
Liang Dingyi	梁丁义
Liang Zhaojin	梁肇晋
Liu Biao	刘标
Liu Kunyi	刘坤一
Luoding	罗定
Luo Jiayou	罗家有
Luo Qilin	罗绮林
Luo Wenlai	罗文来
Luo Yayou	罗亚有
<i>Luzhou gongan</i>	《鹿州公案》
Nanghai	南海
Panyu	番禺
Qingyuan	清远
qiu shen	秋审
shi chu	失出
Sihui	四会
song lei	讼累
Song Xigeng	宋锡庚
Tan Chengkun	谭成坤
Tongzhi	同治
waiban	外办
wang fa	王法
wuxing	五刑
Xingbu	刑部
xingming muke	刑名幕客
Xinhui	新会
<i>Xiyuan lu</i>	《洗冤录》
Xu Zhongming	徐忠明
Zhang Yan	张研

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