

Humanitarianism and the Greater War, 1914–24

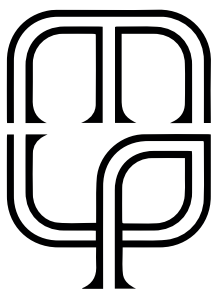


**Edited by Elisabeth Piller
and Neville Wylie**

HUMANITARIANISM
KEY DEBATES & NEW APPROACHES

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Humanitarianism and the Greater War, 1914–24



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HUMANITARIANISM

KEY DEBATES & NEW APPROACHES

HUMANITARIANISM

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Elisabeth Piller and Neville Wylie

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Cover: Near East Relief, 'Hunger knows no Armistice'
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*For Mathilda and for Olivia, Isabella, and Otto:
in the hope that the world they inherit and shape will be more humane,
caring, and compassionate than those that have gone before.*

2

Sagas of swords, scrolls, and dolls: Japanese humanitarian aid to Belgium

Hanne Deleu

Introduction

To the brave Russian and Belgian soldiers: let this package of Japanese tea, which carries the devotion of the Japanese people, serve as a way to quench the thirst from your daily victories, and let it multiply your courage as we pray that you do not abandon the beautiful reward that is victory.

This encouraging message was imprinted in French on ten thousand bags of Japanese green tea to be donated to Belgian soldiers in 1914.¹ It is just one example of the many donations Japan made to Belgium during the First World War, which included not just substantial funds and many small, often hand-made, tokens of sympathy but also thousands of old Japanese manuscripts and scrolls, a decorated vase for the Belgian royal family, and even a sword for King Albert I.

While Japan's military contribution to the Great War remained rather limited, the nation continued to aid Belgium – which the Japanese press continuously presented as a small and young nation inhabited by an infinitely heroic and brave population – until 1926. A diverse pool of actors, ranging from Japanese officials to women's organisations to large corporations, encouraged, organised, and financially supported these humanitarian campaigns. During the Great War Japan came alive with collections for a faraway country few Japanese had previously had any connection to – but why?

This chapter will explore the Japanese humanitarian activities for Belgium during and after the Great War, paying special attention to the plethora of motivations and objectives that propelled the country's charitable activities. While scholars have shown that Japan's political and economic involvement in Great War-era Europe was part of the nation's quest for international acknowledgement, they have so far neglected its various humanitarian efforts.² This neglect is perhaps most perplexing with regard to the humanitarian campaigns for Belgium, which were not only among the period's largest but also reached furthest into Japanese civil society.

Because these aid campaigns benefited a country that had previously played little role in Japanese debates or imaginations, the Belgian case brings the motivations behind Japanese aid into especially bold relief. The chapter not only focuses on official contributors but includes the efforts of those who at first sight would not be considered diplomatic brokers: Japanese women, journalists, and businessmen. It identifies the main motivations that drove contributors to sacrifice time and money to help people living on the other side of the world. In this way the chapter reveals the truly global reverberations of events on the Western front, explores significant shifts in Japanese society, and provides some historical answers to the perennial question of why societies and individuals save strangers at all.

Based on extensive analysis of two national high-circulation newspapers, the *Asabi shinbun* (est. 1879) and the *Yomiuri shinbun* (est. 1874), the chapter shows that three major motives inspired donation campaigns for the Belgian population and the royal family. First, part of the Japanese population was driven by a sense of emotional connection and responsiveness. This sentimental investment in the Belgian cause and empathetic reaction to its perils reflected a range of reasons, including Japanese experiences after the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–95) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5) and an emotional response to wartime images and news reporting, as well as a general sense of compassion. Secondly, the act of fundraising for an international ally such as Belgium provided an opportunity for individuals, organisations, and companies to embody, rehearse, and perform patriotism. For Japan, Belgium became a sort of model nation, both through its prominent position in the political and industrial world order, as well as through its patriotic defiance of foreign interference. Japanese girls and women in particular were encouraged to show their patriotism by practising domestic skills, such as handicrafts, and their involvement was a practical expression and performance of new gendered expectations towards women. For Japanese corporations, too, donations to the Belgian population and royal family became a way to prove their loyalty not so much to the Belgian as to the *Japanese* cause. It is not without a certain irony that participating in international humanitarian efforts affirmed and communicated national belonging and patriotic sentiment. Finally, humanitarian aid intended to present Japan as a reliable and civilised ally. It was rooted in a desire to prove that Japan was a sophisticated global power worthy of standing equally at the side of its allies in the larger international political and economic theatre.

These three sets of motivations – sympathy, patriotism, and search for international recognition – must be understood as ideal types, of course to be sure. In reality, Japanese wartime charity was multifaceted, often serving a variety of overlapping purposes at the same time. As such, the

Japanese case exemplifies how humanitarian aid is never a purely political, economic, military, or even humanitarian activity. Nor is it the sole domain of state representatives, governments, or public institutions. Instead, Japanese humanitarian aid to Belgium was born from the labour, investment, and interests of various participants. As such, it is a powerful reflection of the global dimensions of the Great War as well as a unique window into how Japanese civil society engaged locally with and made sense of that conflict.

Compassion and emotional connectivity

Looking at various motivations behind Japanese aid to Belgium one needs to look first at the mediation of Belgian suffering and the emotional responses and acts of compassion it elicited. From 1914 onward the Belgian fate resonated strongly with the Japanese people, with humanitarian aid serving as the most immediate reflection of that concern. At first glance the Japanese concern for Belgium might appear startling, given the relatively fleeting interactions between the two societies before the war.³ The spontaneous compassion and sympathy that many Japanese seem to have felt towards Belgium were the product of two important developments.

The first were the emotive images and writings created by the Japanese media. In the decades prior to the war lower production costs, increased advertisement revenues, and greater literacy had resulted in the expansion and rising popularisation of print media in Japan, especially newspapers and magazines. Beginning with the German invasion in August 1914 and continuing during the war years, Japanese media reported on Belgium with great frequency and often substantial depth.⁴ Throughout they highlighted the brutal nature of the German army's advance, the extent of destruction and the desperate plight of the population. The cruelty of Belgium's wartime reality was often described in vivid and lugubrious detail. 'No one can dispute,' wrote the *Yomiuri shinbun* in representative fashion in January 1915,

that the most miserable of them all are the Belgian people, whose country is being overrun by the soldiers and horses of other countries, who have no home, no food to eat, and no time to think of the greying elderly freezing in the cold. Even if one's wife or daughter is crying of starvation with a baby at their breast, they cannot be saved. Little girls weep tears of blood with no way to protect themselves, infants wander the streets without a guardian, and those who take the slightest opportunity to seek refuge in other countries do not know whether their husbands or fathers are alive or dead.⁵

Dramatic titles such as ‘How the People of Belgium Are Suffering from the Tyranny of the German Army: An Unprecedented Tragedy’⁶ or ‘A Feast of Torture: Belgian Tears, German Inhumanity’⁷ illustrate how these media drew the reader’s attention and harnessed the sentimental quality of sensational reporting.

The harrowing images conjured up by these writings were strongly reinforced by visual representations of Belgian suffering. Previous scholarship has identified the propagandist and emotive value of visual media, especially with regard to inspiring compassion, and this was certainly true in the Japanese case.⁸ Alongside pictures published in newspapers and magazines, theatre plays, magic lantern shows, newsreels, and exhibitions visually presented the deprivation of the Belgian population and managed to invoke strong emotional responses among spectators across Japan. Lantern slideshows seem to have been of particular importance for Japan’s humanitarian mobilisation and were used by Belgian officials and Japanese organisations alike. In 1915 the Belgian Consul General in Yokohama, Charles Basten, gave a lecture at Waseda University about the tragedies taking place in Belgium, using magic lantern slides to illustrate Belgians’ ordeal, and, as the *Yomiuri shinbun* surmised, ‘to raise sympathy from the university students’.⁹ Later, in February 1917, the *Asahi shinbun* organised its own magic lantern show in an Osaka youth centre, with the projections being accompanied by a translated testimony written by the Belgian Consul General in Kobe.¹⁰ Two months later, a magic lantern slideshow presenting scenes from destroyed Belgian landscapes, pictures of Belgian refugees, and the royal family were shown at a school in Tokyo. Two thousand people, including parents and their children, paid to witness these tragic images, and the proceeds were donated to aid the Belgian victims. According to the newspaper reporting on the event, the projections had ‘moved the visitors deeply’.¹¹ Lantern slideshows were complemented by other visual representations. In May 1918, the translated version of the Russian writer Leonid Andreyev’s theatre piece ‘The Sorrows of Belgium’ was performed by a Japanese theatre group.¹² Portraying Belgium as the main character who provides shelter and solace to a mad girl – meant to represent the tormented Belgian population – the story honoured Belgian wartime patriotism and confronted the audience with the misery of war.¹³ Newsreels, screened in movie theatres and occasionally accompanied by live narration, also featured images of the ongoing war. With titles such as ‘We Should Have Sympathy for Belgium: The German Army’s Tyranny’¹⁴ and ‘Belgium Leuven’s Misery After the War’,¹⁵ these media actively put a spotlight on humanitarian disasters. Photo exhibitions of the war in Belgium also confronted the Japanese public with the terror experienced by the small nation.¹⁶ Not all of these

presentations directly asked for donations, but they did raise awareness of the humanitarian costs of war and arguably shrank the emotional, and for a while geographical, distance between Belgium and Japan. Importantly, theatre plays, lectures, magic lantern shows, and newsreels all targeted different audiences, reaching beyond those who would normally buy or read newspapers or wartime magazines. Writings and visualisations of that sort helped carry the news on the sorrows of Belgians into different strata of Japanese society and presented Belgian distress as immediate and actionable.

Although media coverage played a significant role in eliciting responses to Belgian distress in Japan (as elsewhere), the strong resonance rested also on historical experiences particular to Japan. True, Japanese civilians had never experienced modern warfare on a similar scale at home, but they did understand its devastating consequences. Already two decades earlier, the First Sino-Japanese War had highlighted the need for welfare support of veterans and their dependents.¹⁷ At the time, nurses tended to war victims and noblewomen raised funds for bereaved families.¹⁸ Ten years later, during and after the Russo-Japanese War, myriad private organisations continued to deal with its humanitarian fallout by offering their services to veteran families, orphans, or widows.¹⁹ These recent experiences ensured that newspaper articles titled ‘Relief for Belgian Children’²⁰ or ‘Grand Opera Benefit for Belgian Orphans’²¹ resonated more strongly with the Japanese public and were often immediately comprehensible and meaningful to them. While one can partly attribute Japanese aid to political or nationalist aspirations (see below), ignoring its sentimental motivations would yield a skewed and incomplete picture. More so perhaps than diplomats or industrialists, private donors established an emotional connection to the Belgian cause that drove and bolstered fundraising campaigns.

Embodying and performing patriotism through charity

Yet it would be wrong to attribute Japanese aid only to an often spontaneous sense of sympathy and compassion. In fact, aid was not only inspired by emotional responses but also and increasingly became a stage for the performance of patriotic sentiments. Successively after 1914, aiding Belgium became a public demonstration of a donor’s dedication to the Japanese nation’s domestic convictions and international ambitions. This not only applied to wealthy philanthropists or state representatives but was also evident in Japanese civil society more generally. For women’s organisations as well as companies, humanitarian acts became a public platform to ascertain and act out their patriotism.

This patriotic dimension of aid is especially notable with regard to Japanese girls and women. By contributing to the international war effort, humanitarian aid provided them an opportunity to exert their national citizenship. As scholars have shown, many women's organisations, such as the Canadian Six Nations Women's Patriotic League or the American Young Women's Christian Association, provided relief not solely for their own soldiers and their dependants but also for the Belgian population. International wartime charity allowed women to cultivate and perform their patriotism, while also enhancing the international perception of their nation.²² Similar mechanisms were at play in Japan. From the first, women played a paramount role in aiding Belgium. In January 1915 the Japanese Ladies' Solidarity organisation for Belgium was founded in Tokyo. Headed by two famous female educators, Fusako Yamawaki and Umeko Tsuda, the organisation was supported by many wealthy noblewomen. Early on the organisation located itself in a wider global movement. 'In order to sympathise with the poor Belgian people,' the association proclaimed, 'our society of women, like those in Europe and the United States, has organised a Belgian sympathy association.'²³ Eventually, by selling hand-sewn dolls made by female students, nationwide fundraising calls, and financial support from the Imperial Household, the organisation managed to collect over ¥50,000, for which the Belgian Queen herself expressed gratitude.²⁴ These activities were but a small part of wider female involvement. Several girls' schools, for example, agreed to teach their students about the ongoing war and asked them to put aside some of the money which they earned by 'doing handicrafts or other things they felt confident about'.²⁵ Japanese Red Cross Society nurses also organised several charity events, including a charity night at the Imperial Theatre²⁶ and a collection of money for bandages for the Belgian army.²⁷ In a similar vein the wives of both foreign and Japanese diplomats and female members of the Imperial Household ran and attended charitable events for members of the upper class, including bazaars and benefit concerts. So completely did the *Yomiuri shinbun* identify Belgian fundraising as a female endeavour that it confined most of its reporting on these events to the newspaper's 'women's section'.²⁸ Looking at this female mobilisation it becomes clear that humanitarian aid was a prominent means of expressing wartime patriotism to a global audience. The Japanese Ladies' Solidarity organisation for Belgium, for example, explained its wide-ranging fundraising campaign with its determination 'to live up to our name as a first-class country'.²⁹

In the Japanese context, charity as an expression of patriotism was linked to new social expectations towards women, which crystallised in the 'good wife, wise mother' concept that had emerged in the mid-Meiji period. According to this new gendered ideal, caring for children, older people, or the sick unburdened the state, and thus became an act of selfless patriotism.

Japanese women became the fosters of the state, nursing the nation through their devotion to those the state did not succeed in helping.³⁰ The patriotic wartime mobilisation of women or girls through charity had already been visible during the Russo-Japanese War. In 1904, female students had prepared care packages for Japanese soldiers abroad and donated the money they raised by selling handmade goods at a school bazaar.³¹ A Catholic girls' school in Tokyo organised a Christmas market and donated the proceedings to the Army Ministry.³² Fulfilling one's patriotic duties through charity, and using the opportunity to further develop domestic skills such as needlework, was also supported by women's associations which sought to educate women on their roles and duties in society.³³ Accordingly, selling tea at a charity bazaar for Belgian children was seen as the perfect occasion to teach young girls the virtues and skills needed to prepare tea, as befitting of a loyal daughter, good wife, wise mother, and patriotic citizen.³⁴ In 1917 the Japanese government in a study on female wartime contributions in Europe itself affirmed the benefits of practical and educative charity, such as handicrafts, by women's groups.³⁵

Yet charitable acts not only offered a stage for the performance of Japanese patriotism, they also, by reflecting on the courageous acts of defiance committed by the Belgian population, taught the Japanese public what ideal patriotism looked like. By celebrating Belgian women's courage, for example, they were to educate Japanese women on the patriotic value of personal sacrifice, frequently expressed through a selfless desire to protect one's nation and children. For example, the article 'Women and Children also Pick Up Their Swords: Awaking Belgium' described the valour of Belgian women and how protecting their families always remained their priority.³⁶ Another sensational depiction of Belgian women defending their country can be found in a picture in the *Yomiuri shinbun*, showing female soldiers carrying large rifles at their sides.³⁷ In 1918 an article titled 'Belgian Women during Wartimes Do Not Play to the Tune of the Enemy' recounted how a Belgian woman, prompted by a German soldier to play the piano, had brazenly played the national anthem.³⁸ Following a similar line of dramatic reporting, the wartime magazine *The Truthful Accounts of the European War* published a number of anecdotes from a young Belgian nurse under the title 'The True Accounts of a Brave Belgian Nurse'.³⁹ The courage of Belgian soldiers and the royal family was also addressed in multiple publications, often headed by captivating titles such as 'The Praiseworthy Belgian Army',⁴⁰ 'Belgians Mocking the German Army',⁴¹ or the slightly more cinematic: 'The Belgian King Boards a Balloon to Reconnoitre the Enemy's Position'.⁴² This tendency to celebrate Belgian patriotism and bravery was also apparent in the 1918 monograph *Belgium's Righteous War* – a publication in which Japanese state representatives projected Japanese national

values on to the Belgian population and its acts of patriotic intrepidity.⁴³ These and other publications presented Belgium and its population as a patriotic model and aiding them became a means of rehearsing and performing Japanese patriotism through charitable sacrifices.⁴⁴

In all this, popular print media, such as newspapers and magazines, played a profound role. Not only did they craft humanitarian narratives and disseminate information on charity events but they also helped reinforce their patriotic framing. For example, newspapers regularly printed donor rolls that made public and celebrated individual generosity and (financial) sacrifice. They often expressed particular appreciation for the smallest yet most selfless donations, such as the 50 sen (one sen is one hundredth of one yen) donated by a seventy-four-year-old man who sympathised with the misfortune of Belgians after having lost his own house in a fire.⁴⁵ Such reporting certainly elicited additional giving; even more importantly perhaps, it made sure that patriotic giving (or lack thereof) became public knowledge and hence could be rewarded (or sanctioned). Individual donors could be publicly recognised for demonstrating their loyalty to Japan's suffering ally and, effectively, to Japan itself.

In some instances, newspaper companies went one step further and initiated their own fundraising endeavours, no doubt hoping to use this display of patriotic humanitarianism to acquire symbolic capital and boost circulation. Such was the case with *Asahi shinbun*. From February 1915 on it published a series of forty-seven announcements titled 'Sympathy Money for Belgium', launching a three-month-long fundraising campaign. The initial editorial explained how Belgium was being violated by German troops and called for 'Sympathy Money' to be sent to the newspaper.⁴⁶ The following months also illustrate the important nexus between Japanese giving and appropriate expressions of Belgian gratitude. Just four days after the beginning of the campaign, the *Asahi shinbun* published a letter in which the Belgian minister to Japan, Georges Della Faille, expressed his gratitude for the fundraising drive to the company in the name of his king, his government, and all Belgians.⁴⁷ On 15 May, another letter of gratitude was published together with an announcement that nearly ¥30,000 had been collected.⁴⁸ Later that year Della Faille reached out yet again with 'An Appeal to the Righteous Spirit of the Japanese to Support the Belgian People'. Newspaper fundraising thus opened a Belgian-Japanese dialogue and gave Belgians, in particular, a platform to reach out to the Japanese public.⁴⁹

More curious and symbolic than the 'Sympathy Money' Campaign – but presumably driven by similar motivations – was the sixteenth-century sword which the newspaper company presented to the Belgian King Albert I in January 1915, affectionately calling him 'our Albert'. A written message accompanying the gift lauded Belgium's unparalleled courage and exalted

its endeavour to exterminate injustice and protect humanity, even with its own fate at stake.⁵⁰ The journey of the sword from Japan to Belgium was covered heavily and *Asahi shinbun*'s overseas correspondent handed over the sword with great pathos. 'As a foreigner', he claimed to be deeply honoured to be allowed to unsheathe and present the weapon in front of a king on whose life a bounty had been placed by the enemy. He considered himself, as he made clear, a representative not only of the *Asahi shinbun* but also of the Japanese people. King Albert responded with gratitude and praised Japan as an industrially and military developed nation.⁵¹ The *Asahi shinbun* responded to the king's message of appreciation by sponsoring a magic lantern event on suffering of the Belgian people.⁵² The *Asahi shinbun* as a company had clearly come to recognise the value of associating itself with a patriotic cause like Belgium.

Judging from these examples, Japanese aid to Belgium acquired patriotic value in two ways. Firstly, Belgian citizens and their acts of defiance provided a template for what it meant to be patriotic and allowed the Japanese public to reflect on different ways in which they themselves could live up to their civic duties. At the same time, acts of transnational compassion, especially to heroic Belgium, helped to underline Japanese virtues and to publicly demonstrate and perform (gendered) notions of Japanese patriotism.

A political goodwill campaign

Finally, it must be acknowledged that Japanese humanitarian mobilisation, as spontaneous and heartfelt as it often was, was embedded in larger political agendas, most notably Japan's search for international recognition and equal standing. Japan's military involvement in the Great War, small though it was compared to that of its fellow Allied Powers, has been described less as an act of moral commitment to its allies than an imperial expansionist quest to gain a strong foothold in Asia. It has also been regarded as a strategic goodwill campaign, intent on gaining international recognition for Japan as a global power.⁵³ In fact, despite the revisions of the unequal treaties, established in the nineteenth century by mostly North American and Western European nations, the country had struggled to be accepted as a modernised and civilised state deserving of equal treatment. While extraterritoriality and unfair tariffs had been lifted domestically, Japanese citizens continued to face discrimination abroad. The California Alien Land Bill in 1913 is one example of the biased treatment of Japanese citizens by Western powers.⁵⁴ Racial inequality also surfaced in political discussions on international alliances. For example, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance had been

renewed in 1911 chiefly to limit Japan's naval range and restrict the influx of Japanese immigrants in British territories.⁵⁵

At the time Japan did not only want to be accepted as an equal, it also desired to be acknowledged as the leading power in East Asia. These sentiments would later lead Japan to push for the Racial Equality Clause in the League of Nations, but the rejection of the clause only highlighted the limits of Japan's global authority.⁵⁶ Still, Japan's methods of inspiring goodwill were not entirely exhausted. In the era of the Great War, humanitarian campaigns were a primary means to establish itself as a modern and benevolent nation. While presented as an act of selfless compassion, humanitarian aid also became a political tool, whether through its diplomatic implications or politically beneficial yields; and Japan was no exception.⁵⁷

Several examples may illustrate the political dimension to Japanese aid. The 1915–16 mission of the Japanese Red Cross Society (JRCS) to Europe was one prominent effort of trying to achieve a positive reception of Japan's modernisation. Three groups of around twenty carefully selected JRCS nurses and doctors were sent on relief missions to the United Kingdom, France, and Russia. As members of the global Red Cross movement, these 'medical ambassadors' seemed particularly suited to represent the sophistication of Japan's medical science and advanced humanitarian organisation.⁵⁸ The organisation's president explicitly acknowledged that the mission would reflect both on the reputation of the JRCS and on 'the prestige of the Japanese empire'.⁵⁹ At Netley Royal Victoria Military Hospital (near Southampton in the United Kingdom) Japanese nurses and doctors cared for roughly 2,500 patients, effectively demonstrating the JRCS's ability to operate according to Western concepts of humanitarian values and practical standards.⁶⁰ Similar political hopes inspired the humane treatment of European prisoners of war held in Japan. Tales of friendships and co-operation between the prisoners and Japanese guards dominated future narrations of these events.⁶¹ One newspaper editorial even claimed that Japan's treatment of PoWs should serve as an example to the rest of the world.⁶² During the Great War humane treatment and humanitarian activities became means to prove and illustrate Japan's degree of development and civilisation.

Yet neither charitable efforts nor their political intentions were limited to (quasi-)state entities like the JRCS. Rather, the Great War continued pre-Meiji-era traditions of non-state interventionist approaches to welfare. Social relief in Japan had typically relied on local mutual aid and the mobilisation of social elites whose generosity was expected to limit the state's financial responsibility for the sick and poor.⁶³ Keeping this in mind, it is often hard to draw a clear line between private and public actors. This was apparent in the humanitarian efforts for Belgium. Private actors, such as the

industrialist Shibusawa Eiichi or the aristocrat Satsuma Jirōhachi, acted as representatives of the Japanese state and assumed the financial burden of the government's international goodwill and humanitarian campaigns. One example is the Economic Association for the Sick and Wounded Soldiers of the Allied Nations established by Shibusawa in 1917. The organisation's board included affluent industrialists, like the board chairman of the Tokyo Stock Exchange, the president of the Mitsubishi family-owned shipping company Nihon Yusen Kaisha, and the chairman of the Kirin Beer Company. The association was supported by Prime Minister Terauchi Masatake's cabinet and profiled itself as a private and public organisation, even as its activities barely included non-elites. Although the association ultimately fell short of its ambitious fundraising goal, it illustrates the blurring of boundaries between public and private in Japanese relief campaigns.⁶⁴ Companies involved did not only intend to commit an act of sympathy and patriotism; they also wished to help Japan and themselves claim a place in a new postwar world order.⁶⁵

Japan's humanitarian politicking might be said to have reached its high-point in 1921 with Crown Prince Hirohito's European tour and Japan's subsequent donations to the Central University Library of Leuven. From April until July of 1921 Hirohito traversed the war-ravaged lands of Western Europe, expressing his sympathy and grief to his European allies. The journey was no ordinary sightseeing trip but was to prepare him for his role as the future Emperor of Japan.⁶⁶ Although the journey's official chronicles denied that the tour had any political intentions, it did stress that the visit was to correct 'flattering misconceptions' about Japan. These mostly concerned European stereotypes that cast the nation as ancient and 'oriental' rather than one 'of modern industrialism, enterprise, and progress'. To counter these fallacies, the royal envoy was to show that the Japanese enjoyed a similar level of sophistication and civilisation – and humanitarian aid turned out to be the perfect means to this end.⁶⁷ During his visit to Belgium in June the Crown Prince offered 5,000 F to the mayor of Brussels to relieve the suffering of the capital's poor.⁶⁸ On top of a visit to Liège and Ypres, he also visited the ruins of the library of the Catholic University of Leuven, whose destruction (including 300,000 manuscripts) by German invaders had become a touchpoint of international sympathy for Belgium and a much-cited symbol of German 'barbarism'. It was at this site of savage destruction – where 'German Culture Ends', as an on-site banner informed – that the representation of Japanese culture began.

Two months after Hirohito's return, a Japanese national committee of L'Oeuvre Internationale de Louvain was founded to join the international project of reconstructing the library. By 1926 the committee had donated a collection of over 13,682 Japanese books and scrolls purchased from

700,000 F collected in Japan. Additional donations included a tea set used for tea ceremonies, a decorated vase, a box with materials used for calligraphy, and bookshelves.⁶⁹ Importantly, these would all be housed in a new Japanese room at the library, which was meant to showcase 'the civilization of Japan and the far Orient', as the Japanese ambassador to Belgium, Mineichirō Adachi, noted. Wealthy families and modern research institutes were the main contributors, such as the Mitsui industrialist family, the Bank of Japan, the Ministry of the Imperial Household, universities, and scientific organisations. The committee itself included major representatives of Japanese philanthropy such as the businessman Eiichi Shibusawa and Prince Saionji. The manuscripts dating from before the Meiji Revolution covered a wide range of topics representing Japan's more traditional culture, such as arts, science, medicine, and religion. However, the collection of more recent works, including Japanese translations of foreign publications, was to represent a modernised Japan that had caught up with Western expectations of civilisation. Irrespective of the books' contents, the donations carried high symbolic value for Japan. As the reconstruction of Leuven's library was often likened to the reconstruction of civilisation itself, Japan symbolically took its place among other civilised great power donors.

Overall the donation proved a good investment. It was well received in Belgium and resulted in another round of appreciations and representations. A Belgian honorary doctorate for ambassador Adachi was immediately reciprocated by the announcement that the aristocrat Jirōhachi Satsuma would fund a seminar called the Satsuma Chair at the Catholic University of Leuven, covering Japanese topics. The quasi-official nature of this private act of philanthropy is underlined by the fact that the seminar's contents were to be approved annually by the Japanese embassy.⁷⁰ This train of events, lasting into the mid-1920s, illustrate an almost seamless transition from humanitarian relief to cultural reconstruction and diplomacy in the postwar years. Part of what made that transition so smooth, it is fair to assume, was that both wartime aid and postwar gifts were elements of a wider political campaign to showcase Japan's high level of civilisation and its adoption of Western values and standards.

Conclusion

At first glance Japan's humanitarian involvement in the First World War appears puzzling. The country deliberately limited its military participation, minimising its practical contributions to the Allied victory in November 1918. At the same time, Japan supported its allies through humanitarian aid. Belgium, as a global representative for the suffering of the valiant yet

helpless, became a subject of compassion which hinged on the aspirations and motivations of a diverse group of actors.

Visual and print media informed Japanese society on the plight of Belgium and tapped into audiences' emotional responsiveness, which was clearly heightened by recent war experiences. Japanese mass media depicted Belgians as victims of unspeakable acts of inhumanity, whilst also repeatedly painting them as patriotic martyrs. These contradictory representations of Belgium expose the versatile use of international charity for Japan: the suffering of Belgians affirmed the necessity for Japanese to mobilise themselves and make sacrifices for allies while also presenting extreme examples of patriotic self-sacrifices. Drawing on traditions of civil welfare and new gendered norms, affluent and female citizens, in particular, were expected to present their loyalty to Japan through acts of compassion. It was this diverse group of donors, ranging from industrial magnates to schoolgirls, who carried the weight of demonstrating Japan's progress to the world.

The question remains whether their humanitarian support for Belgium actually helped stakeholders achieve their goals. There is at least some evidence to that effect. Domestically, the mobilisation of women through charity anchored their role as patriotic caretakers of the nation. In 1919 the JRCS and the Patriotic Ladies' Associations announced that they wanted to continue to 'contribute to the preservation of the state' through relief work and handicrafts, following the British example.⁷¹ Civil participation of women and girls through philanthropy continued to play an important role in the interwar period, and co-operation with the government allowed for (minor) improvements in women's public rights as citizens. Women's organisations gradually became absorbed by the state until finally, in the Second World War, the boundaries between most public and private organisations dissolved.⁷²

On an official level the Japanese Red Cross Society joined the League of Red Cross Societies, founded in 1919, where its membership played a decisive role in the establishment of the organisation. According to the JRCS's representative, Japan's inclusion would be essential in maintaining 'the international standing of Japan as a world power'.⁷³ Nevertheless, when the League of Nations rejected the Racial Equality Clause in 1919 – largely due to British dominions trying to prevent Asian immigration – it denied Japanese citizens the right to be treated as equals. One contemporary Japanese commentator even attributed this failure to the fact that the Japanese delegates had been raised by uneducated traditional wet nurses, internalising the notion that Japan was still unmodern.⁷⁴ In this instance Japan's performance of modernity through humanitarian aid fell clearly short of the desired effect, thereby sharply illustrating the limits of humanitarian politics. In 1933, Japan withdrew from the League of Nations

and continued its imperialist agenda, blaming its departure on Japan's unequal treatment.⁷⁵

In the case of Belgium, however, Japan's compassion did not go unrewarded. In 1921, the Japanese legation was upgraded to an embassy and Mineichirō Adachi, a strong supporter of wartime Belgium, was appointed to ambassadorial rank. A direct product of wartime support, this elevation of diplomatic status paved the way for a more equal representation of Japan in Belgium.⁷⁶ The Satsuma Chair also continues at the Catholic University of Leuven to this day and the 1926 collection of scrolls and books miraculously survived the second time the library was destroyed during the Second World War. In 2015 the two countries celebrated their 150-year-old friendship, although Japanese aid was, tellingly perhaps, not mentioned.⁷⁷

Belgium was attributed many different roles by Japanese donors. To some Belgium represented a 'small nation' that had roused significant interest, investment, and support from global powers, a treatment many Japanese industrial and political actors desired for their own country. To others Belgium became a textbook example for patriotism, and allowed them to display similar sentiments through charity. And lest we forget the horrifying inhumanity of war, to many the suffering of Belgians became a source of emotional familiarity and transnational solidarity. While one can speculate on what specific incentives drove particular individuals or groups, the Japanese case does clearly highlight the intersectional character of humanitarian aid, stressing how one action or one person could be encouraged by multiple motivations, and how trying to disentangle these different motivations can do injustice to the complexity of people's lived realities. After all, who is to say whether the schoolgirls aiding Belgium were primarily concerned with living up to their obligations as young women, wanted to contribute to Japan's global ascendancy, were instead moved by compassion, or simply followed their teacher's instructions? Perhaps tea producers or newspaper companies did use charity as a way to market their businesses or promote Japan's international image rather than trying to console their bereaved Belgian allies in what they considered the most compassionate and culturally meaningful way: by offering quenching green tea and legendary swords.

Notes

- 1 Fifteen thousand bags, produced by the Central Association for Tea Industry in Tokyo, carried the same message in Russian for Russian troops. 'Ro Hakugun ni Nihoncha', *Asahi shinbun*, 4 October 1914, p. 5.
- 2 Previous literature on Japan's activities in the war focuses mainly on its military or political participation, as well as the economic gains it obtained by its industries

- profiting from the paralysis of Europe's industrial production. For more information on these perspectives refer to F. R. Dickinson, *World War One and the Triumph of a New Japan, 1919–1930* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); T. Minohara, T. Hon, and E. Dawley (eds), *The Decade of the Great War: Japan and the Wider World in the 1910's* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); G. Xu, *Asia and the Great War: A Shared History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
- 3 Official ties between the two nations started only in 1866 with the signing of the Treaty of Amity, Commerce and Navigation. D. De Ruyver, 'The First Treaty Between Belgium and Japan (1866)', in W. F. Vande Walle and D. De Cooman (eds), *Japan & Belgium: An Itinerary of Mutual Inspiration* (Tiel: Lannoo, 2016), pp. 21–2.
 - 4 J. L. Huffman, *Creating a Public: People and Press in Meiji Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997).
 - 5 'Berugī dōjōkai katsudō kaishi', *Yomiuri shinbun*, 28 January 1915, p. 5.
 - 6 This article also features a picture of Belgian refugees. 'Berugī kokumin wa ikani konkushitsutsu aru ka', *Asahi shinbun*, 2 December 1915, p. 3.
 - 7 'Gochisō no kōmon: Berugijin no namida', *Yomiuri shinbun*, 4 April 1917, p. 5.
 - 8 One striking example is the use of sensational imageries by the Red Cross in the early twentieth century in order to raise sympathy for its humanitarian actions. K. Rozario, "'Delicious Horrors": Mass Culture, the Red Cross, and the Appeal of Modern American Humanitarianism', *American Quarterly*, 55 (2003), pp. 417–55.
 - 9 'Wadai no Berugī sanjō gentō', *Yomiuri shinbun*, 15 February 1915, p. 5.
 - 10 'Hakkoku sanjō kōenkai', *Asahi shinbun*, 28 February 1915, p. 2.
 - 11 'Hongō shōgakkō no Berugī gentōkai', *Yomiuri shinbun*, 27 April 1917, p. 4.
 - 12 'Yūrakuzo: Berugī no hiai', *Asahi shinbun*, 3 May 1918, 7; 'Berugī no hiai', *Yomiuri shinbun*, 7 May 1918, p. 6.
 - 13 M. L. Arnold, 'War Plays Today', *The Advocate of Peace*, 78:3 (March 1916), pp. 69–74.
 - 14 As published in a programme leaflet of the Tōkyō Shinkyōkyoku Kabukiza on 28 February 1915. This leaflet belongs to the Ritsumeikan Daigaku Kokusai Heiwa Myūjiamu's Hatano Uichirō collection.
 - 15 The leaflet of this live narrated newsreel belongs to the Ritsumeikan Daigaku Kokusai Heiwa Myūjiamu's Hatano Uichirō collection.
 - 16 'Tada hitotsu no shinbunshi', *Yomiuri shinbun*, 20 January 1917, p. 5; J. Schmidt, 'Not a Secondary Experience: The First World War in Japanese Mass Media, Ministerial Bureaucracy Publications, Elementary Schools, and Department Stores', in A. P. Pires, J. Schmidt, and M. I. Tato (eds), *The Global First World War African, East Asian, Latin American and Iberian Mediators* (London: Routledge, 2021), p. 151.
 - 17 D. W. Kinzley, 'Changing Views of Poverty and Social Welfare in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Asian History*, 22:1 (1988), 20.
 - 18 S. H. Nolte and S. A. Hastings, 'The Meiji State's Policy Toward Women, 1890–1910', in Gail Lee Bernstein (ed.), *Recreating Japanese Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 161–2.

- 19 One example is the wartime day care centres, called *hokanjo*, which took care of the children of families whose fathers served or had died in the Russo-Japanese War. K. S. Uno, *Passages to Modernity: Motherhood, Childhood, and Social Reform in Early Twentieth Century Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), pp. 76–7.
- 20 'Berugī jidō kyūzai', *Yomiuri shinbun*, 10 April 1917, p. 4.
- 21 'Berugī koji no tame', *Yomiuri shinbun*, 13 February 1916, p. 5.
- 22 More on this matter and other ways in which women committed to acts of patriotism at the home front can be found in P. Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilising Charity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014); S. R. Grayzel, 'Mothers, Mairaines, and Prostitutes: Morale and Morality in First World War France', *The International History Review*, 19:1 (1997), 66–82; I. Sharp and M. Stibbe, *Aftermaths of War: Women's Movements and Female Activists, 1918–1923* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).
- 23 'Berugī dōjōkai katsudō kaishi', *Yomiuri shinbun*, 28 January 1915, p. 5.
- 24 'Go man en o Berugī kōshi e', *Yomiuri shinbun*, 13 July 1915, p. 4.
- 25 'Zenkoku joshikō yori Berugī e kifu', *Yomiuri shinbun*, 8 March 1915, p. 3.
- 26 'Shirofutagi jizenkōgyō', *Asahi shinbun*, 14 April 1916, p. 6.
- 27 'Kaku hidenka yori hōtai kizō: Isamashiki Berugīgūn e', *Yomiuri shinbun*, 11 October 1914, p. 5.
- 28 'Ongaku jizenshi', *Asahi shinbun*, 9 April 1918, p. 7; 'Dōjō jizenichi', *Asahi shinbun*, 18 May 1916, p. 5.
- 29 'Berugī dōjōkai katsudō kaishi', p. 5.
- 30 S. Garon, 'Women's Groups and the Japanese State: Contending Approaches to Political Integration, 1890–1945', *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 19:1 (1993), 5–41.
- 31 'Jogakkō ga kōnai ni juppeibako ya jizenbako', *Yomiuri shinbun*, 12 December 1904, p. 3.
- 32 'Kurisutokyō jogakkō no jizenkai', *Yomiuri shinbun*, 31 October 1894, p. 3.
- 33 The Aikoku Fujinkai, meaning Patriotic Ladies' Association, is one of the most well-known organisations that cultivated patriotic acts through relief work and teaching practical skills such as needlework. More can be found in K. Morita, 'Activities of the Japanese Patriotic Ladies' Association', in M. Mikuta (ed.), *Women, Activism and Social Change: Stretching Boundaries* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 49–70.
- 34 'Berugī jidō kyūzai no kyōiku bazā', *Yomiuri shinbun*, 24 June 1917, p. 4.
- 35 Rinji Gunji Chōsa Iinkai, *Ōshūsen to Kōsen Kakkoku Fujin* (Tokyo: Senryūdō, 1917), pp. 20–3.
- 36 'Onna ya kodomo mo tsurugi o motte: Okiteru Berugī', *Yomiuri shinbun*, 18 August 1918, p. 5.
- 37 'Jū o motte okiteru Berugī no jogun', *Yomiuri shinbun*, 11 September 1914, p. 5.
- 38 'Senji no Berugī fujin teki ni kokka o danzu', *Yomiuri shinbun*, 16 June 1918, p. 4.
- 39 'Yūkannaru Berugī kangofu no jitsuwa', *Ōshū Sensō Jikki*, 37 (1915), pp. 57–61.

- 40 'Tanshōsubeki Hakugun', *Asahi shinbun*, 30 October 1914, p. 2.
- 41 G. Roche, 'Dokugun o kurōsuru Berugijin', *Ōshū Sensō Jikki*, 45 (1915), pp. 117–19.
- 42 'Hakkokuō kikyū ni norite tekijinchi o teisatsusu', *Asahi shinbun*, 5 October 1914, p. 5.
- 43 C. Buffin, *Hakkoku no Gisen*, trans. Machida Shirō (Tokyo: Teimi Shuppansha, 1918).
- 44 F. Kurosawa, 'Japanese Perceptions of Belgium in the Meiji and Taisho Periods', in W. F. Vande Walle and D. De Cooman (eds), *Japan & Belgium: An Itinerary of Mutual Inspiration* (Tiel: Lannoo, 2016), pp. 187–214.
- 45 'Shizu no onna no dōjōkin gojū sen o Berugimin e', *Yomiuri shinbun*, 21 February 1915, p. 5.
- 46 'Hakkoku dōjō gikin boshū', *Asahi shinbun*, 10 February 1915, p. 3.
- 47 'Hakkoku kōshi no kanshajō', *Asahi shinbun*, 14 February 1915, p. 8.
- 48 'Hakkoku dōjō gikin', *Asahi shinbun*, 15 May 1915, p. 3.
- 49 'Berugī kokumin no sanjō nit suki Nihon kokumin no gishin ni utau', *Jiji shinpō*, 8 October 1915.
- 50 'Tachi kenjōki (5) Berugī kōtei (5) Sojinkan', *Asahi shinbun*, 24 April 1915, p. 6.
- 51 'Tachi kenjōki (17) ekken (ue) Sojinkan', *Asahi shinbun*, 10 May 1915, p. 6; 'Tachi kenjōki (18) ekken (shita) Sojinkan', *Asahi shinbun*, 11 May 1915, p. 6.
- 52 'Hakkoku sanjō no gentō', *Asahi shinbun*, 1 March 1915, p. 5.
- 53 Dickinson, *World War One and the Triumph of a New Japan*, pp. 20–2.
- 54 Xu, *Asia and the Great War*, pp. 188–91.
- 55 At the same time, while this quest for racial equality could be perceived as an outcry made by Japan in order to gain global acceptance of non-Caucasian nationalities, the Japanese delegates were not inspired by compassion for all other nationalities. Japan still maintained discriminatory double standards for other Asian nationalities, even referring to them as their 'second-rate' Asian neighbours. Minohara et al., *The Decade of the Great War*, p. 24.
- 56 For more on the racial equality clause refer to N. Shimazu, *Japan, Race and Equality: The Racial Equality Proposal of 1919* (London: Routledge, 1998).
- 57 M. N. Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), p. 33.
- 58 H. Tomida and G. Daniels, 'Medical Ambassadors: Japanese Red Cross Nurses in Great Britain, 1915–1916', *Seijō Daigaku Hijōkin*, 4:1 (2009), 107–11.
- 59 Y. Makita, 'The Alchemy of Humanitarianism: The First World War, the Japanese Red Cross and the Creation of an International Public Health Order', *First World War Studies*, 5:1 (2014), 121–2.
- 60 B. C. Hacker and M. Vining, *A Companion to Women's Military History* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 204–5.
- 61 Despite stories of the excellent treatment of First World War PoWs, the reality of camp life was not as rosy as depicted in remembrances of that period. M. Murphy, 'Brücken, Beethoven und Baumkuchen: German and Austro-Hungarian Prisoners of War and the Japanese Home Front', in J. Bürgschwentner,

- M. Egger, and G. Barth-Scalmani (eds), *Other Fronts, Other Wars? First World War Studies on the Eve of the Centennial* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 132–5.
- 62 ‘Horyo no taigū: Wagakuni wa mohan’, *Asahi shinbun*, 12 October 1914, p. 3.
- 63 The history of modern Japanese welfare can be found in S. Garon, *Molding Japanese Minds: The State in Everyday Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 25–59.
- 64 In the end, the organisation managed to rake together only ¥1,818,554.472, hardly two-thirds of the originally planned amount. Belgium received ¥363,000. T. Izaō, ‘Daiichiji Sekaitaisen to Minshū Ishiki: Futatsu no Kanmin Gassaku Bokinundō o Megutte’, *Nihonshi Kenkyūkai*, 535 (March 2007), 112.
- 65 Izaō, ‘Daiichiji Sekaisen’, 106.
- 66 The tour started on 3 March and lasted until 3 September. Detailed accounts of the tour can be found in Y. Futara and S. Sawada, *The Crown Prince’s European Tour* (Osaka: The Osaka Mainichi Publishing Co., 1926).
- 67 *Ibid.*, pp. 7–10.
- 68 ‘Het Bezoek van Kroonprins Hirohito aan België’, *De Telegraaf*, 13 June 1921.
- 69 ‘Une Donation d’Exception’, Université Catholique de Louvain, accessed 3 October 2021, <https://uclouvain.be/fr/bibliotheques/respat/une-donation-d-exception.html>.
- 70 An additional ¥60,000 was collected to prepare and ship the collection. W. F. Vande Walle, *Orientalia: Oosterse Studies en Bibliotheken te Leuven en Louvain-la-Neuve* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001), pp. 65–75.
- 71 ‘Aikoku Fujinkai wa nani o shiteiruka’, *Asahi shinbun*, 24 May 1919, p. 5.
- 72 Garon, *Molding Japanese Minds*, pp. 140–5.
- 73 Makita, ‘The Alchemy of Humanitarianism’, 123.
- 74 ‘Wagakuni no katei de yatou mukyōiku no uba wa hoka’, *Yomiuri shinbun*, 16 September 1919, p. 4.
- 75 Shimazu, *Japan, Race and Equality*, p. 179.
- 76 Kurosawa, ‘Japanese Perceptions’, pp. 234–5.
- 77 ‘150 Years of Friendship between Japan and Belgium’, Embassy of Japan in Belgium, accessed 3 October 2021, www.be.emb-japan.go.jp/150jb/en/index.html.