

FORUM ARTICLE

*‘We Must Send a Gift Worthy of India and the Congress!’ War and political humanitarianism in late colonial South Asia**

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Abstract

The interwar period has recently been described as a highly internationalist one in South Asia, as a series of distinct internationalisms—communist, anarchist, social scientific, socialist, literary, and aesthetic¹—took shape. At the same time, it has been argued that the Second Sino-Japanese War of 1937 drew to a close various opportunities for international association (at least, temporarily). Taking into account both these contradistinctive developments, this article deals with another—and thus far largely overlooked—South Asian internationalism in the form of wartime Indian humanitarianism. In 1938, the Indian National Congress helped organize an Indian medical mission to China to bring relief to Chinese victims of the Second Sino-Japanese War. By focusing on this initiative, this article traces the ideas, the practices, and the motives of Indian political humanitarianism. It argues that such initiatives, as they became part of much wider global networks of humanitarianism in the late 1930s and early 1940s, created new openings for Indian nationalists to establish international alliances. This article also examines the way in which political humanitarianism enabled these same nationalists to perform as independent leaders on an international stage, and argues that humanitarianism served as a tool of anti-colonial emancipation.

* I am indebted to the editors of this Forum issue, and to Daniel Laqua, Alexandra Pfeiff as well as the two anonymous reviewers for their comments and criticism.

¹ M. Goswami, ‘Imaginary futures and colonial internationalisms’, *American Historical Review*, vol. 117, 5, 2012, p. 1465.

Introduction

The interwar period has recently been described as highly internationalist. With regard to South Asia, internationalism took multiple forms—communist, anarchist, social scientific, socialist, literary and aesthetic—and was characterized by global interactions and transnational interventions.² Although it has also been rightly argued that, with the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, various opportunities for international association drew (temporarily) to a close,³ this article reveals that at the same time the war functioned as a source of new and revitalized connections.

To this end, it examines Indian perceptions of, and engagements in, the war in Asia of 1937–1945 by taking up the example of the Indian medical mission to China. By focusing on this mission, it traces ideas, practices, and motives of Indian political humanitarianism in the late colonial period. Humanitarian relief is, despite contrary claims, rarely apolitical, but comprises intrinsically political dimensions.⁴ However, when applying the term ‘political humanitarianism’ in this article, I refer to a form of humanitarianism in which political motivations are particularly overt. To understand ‘humanitarianism as a form of politics’ also implies, according to Daniel Laqua, that we

² See among others: *ibid.*, pp. 1461–1485; C. Stolte and H. Fischer-Tiné, ‘Imagining Asia in India: Nationalism and internationalism (ca. 1905–1940)’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 54, 1, 2012, pp. 65–92; M. Ramnath, *The Hajj to utopia: How the Ghadar movement charted global radicalism and attempted to overthrow the British empire*, University of California Press, Santa Cruz, 2011; S. Bose and K. Manjapra (eds), *Cosmopolitan thought zones: South Asia and the global circulation of ideas*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2010; M. Sinha, ‘Suffragism and internationalism: The enfranchisement of British and Indian women under an imperial state’, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 36, 4, 1999, pp. 461–484. For South Asian internationalism prior to the interwar period see: K. Manjapra, ‘Knowledgeable internationalism and the Swadeshi movement, 1903–1921’, *Economic & Political Weekly*, vol. 47, 42, Oct. 2012, pp. 53–62; H. Fischer-Tiné, ‘Indian nationalism and the “world forces”’: Transnational and diasporic dimensions of the Indian freedom movement on the eve of the First World War’, *Journal of Global History*, vol. 2, 2007, pp. 325–344; M. R. Frost, ‘“Beyond the limits of nation and geography”: Rabindranath Tagore and the cosmopolitan moment, 1916–1920’, *Cultural Dynamics*, vol. 24, 2–3, 2012, pp. 143–158.

³ C. Stolte, ‘Orienting India: Interwar internationalism in an Asian inflection, 1917–1937’, PhD thesis, University of Leiden, 2013, p. 198.

⁴ M. Barnett, *Empire of humanity: A history of humanitarianism*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca/London, 2011, pp. 5–6, 32, 34, 38 and 40.

take into account the humanitarians' views on domestic politics and the international order.⁵

In the case of Indian relief initiatives during the war of 1937–1945, this understanding translates into three interconnected arguments. First, Indian political humanitarianism was closely linked to nationalist claims for sovereignty from British colonial rule; it became an unequivocally anti-colonial endeavour which reflected a stridently independent foreign policy approach. Secondly, Indian humanitarian initiatives created a new opening for international linkages, as they became part of global networks of humanitarianism and leftist solidarity in the late 1930s and early 1940s. And finally, the Indian medical mission to China symbolized the climax of changing Indian (political) perspectives of, and relations with, East Asia. Taking a closer look at this mission thus enhances our understanding of the war in Asia as both a rupturing force and a globalizing historical force.

Nationalist India's relations with China and Japan

The Indian public, especially nationalist politicians and intellectuals, took a strong interest in political, economic, and cultural developments in China and Japan from the early twentieth century onwards. Japan's victory over Russia in 1905 had changed Indian perceptions of the East Asian country and deeply affected Indian nationalism. Japan's success not only contradicted the myth of the 'supremacy of the white race', it also revealed the possibility of a non-Western, Asian modernity.⁶ Its economic expansionism from the late nineteenth century on—made visible, for instance, by new Japanese steamship routes to Indian ports—also added to the increasing cultural and political Indian interest.⁷ As a result, intellectuals on the subcontinent developed

⁵ D. Laqua, 'Inside the humanitarian cloud: Causes and motivations to help friends and strangers', *Journal of Modern European History*, vol. 12, 2, 2014, p. 177.

⁶ T. R. Sareen, 'India and the war', in *The impact of the Russo-Japanese war*, R. Kowner (ed.), Routledge, London, 2007, pp. 239–250; G. Dharampal-Frick, 'Der Russisch-Japanische Krieg und die indische Nationalbewegung', in *Der Russisch-Japanische Krieg 1904/05: Anbruch einer neuen Zeit?*, M. H. Sprotte, W. Seifert and H.-D. Löwe (eds), Harrossowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 2007, pp. 259–276.

⁷ C. Lin, 'Japanese shipping in India and the British resistance, 1891–1918', *The International History Review*, vol. 32, 2, 2010, pp. 307–318; K. Sugihara, 'Patterns of Asia's integration into the world economy, 1880–1913', in *The integration of the world economy, 1850–1914, Vol. II.*, C. K. Harley (ed.), Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, Cheltenham, 1996, pp. 700–717.

pan-Asian ideas that featured prominently in public debates until the 1950s.⁸

The initial enthusiasm for Japan found expression in growing economic relations, an intensification of educational transfers, and in Indian efforts to win Japan's assistance in the anti-colonial freedom struggle.⁹ For the latter reason, several Indian nationalists, such as Mohammed Barkatullah, Rashbehari Bose, M. N. Roy, and Lala Lajpat Rai, visited Japan, which had become a hub for Asian revolutionaries in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Here, Indians met fellow nationalists from China like Sun Yat-sen and also became associated with anti-British organizations and movements.¹⁰ Yet, although the connection to Japan remained important for some Indian revolutionaries and travellers during and after the First World War,¹¹ Japan's reputation as supporter of anti-colonial struggles suffered after 1915 as a consequence of its foreign policy ambitions. Japan's role in the First World War, its policies towards Korea and China, as well as its attitude during the peace negotiations in Paris, were critically discussed by the Indian public in the late 1910s. Some Indian commentators refused to support Japan's efforts to safeguard

⁸ Stolte, 'Orienting India'; H. Fischer-Tiné, "'The cult of Asianism': Asiendiskurse in Indien zwischen Nationalismus und Internationalismus (ca. 1885–1955)', *Comparativ*, vol. 18, 6, 2008, pp. 16–33; S. Hay, *Asian ideas of East and West: Tagore and his critics in Japan, China, and India*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1970, p. 42; M. Krása, 'The idea of Pan-Asianism and the nationalist movement in India', *Archiv Orientální*, vol. 40, 1972, pp. 38–60.

⁹ Fischer-Tiné, 'Indian nationalism and the "world forces"', pp. 328 and 336–338; A. C. Bose, *Indian revolutionaries abroad, 1905–1922: In the backgrounds of international developments*, Bharati Bhawan, Patna, 1971, pp. 66–70; C. Aydin, *The politics of anti-westernism in Asia: Visions of world order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian thought*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2007, pp. 81 and 114–118; T. R. Sareen, *Indian revolutionaries, Japan and British imperialism*, Anmol, New Delhi, 1993, pp. 8–10; N. Green, 'Shared infrastructures, informational asymmetries: Persians and Indians in Japan, c. 1890–1930', *Journal of Global History*, vol. 8, 3, 2013, pp. 424–435.

¹⁰ B. R. Deepak, 'Colonial connections: Indian and Chinese nationalists in Japan and China', *China Report*, vol. 48, 1–2, 2012, pp. 148–156; Bose, *Indian revolutionaries abroad*, pp. 66–70; Fischer-Tiné, 'Indian nationalism and the "world forces"', pp. 336–338; Aydin, *The politics of anti-westernism*, p. 115; M. Goebel, 'Geopolitics, transnational solidarity or diaspora nationalism? The global career of M. N. Roy, 1915–1930', *European Review of History*, vol. 21, 4, 2014, p. 488; M. Framke, 'Vorbild oder Feindbild? Die Wahrnehmung Japans in Indien von 1915–1920', *Bochumer Jahrbuch zur Ostasienforschung*, vol. 34, 2011, p. 107; E. Hotta, 'Rash Behari Bose and his Japanese supporter', *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 8, 1, 2006, pp. 116–132.

¹¹ Stolte, 'Orienting India', pp. 147–155; Hotta, 'Rash Behari Bose', pp. 116–132; Green, 'Shared infrastructures', pp. 429–433.

its territorial expansions and backed Chinese and Korean demands for self-determination instead.¹²

During the interwar period, Indian politicians and intellectuals came closer to developing bilateral cooperative relations with their Chinese counterparts. The well-known cosmopolitan and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, for instance, visited China on an invited lecture tour in 1924. Although his host, the prominent Chinese historian Liang Quichao, and other members of Chinese intellectual circles received Tagore with great interest, it soon became apparent that the majority of his audience and especially the (radical) student movement shared neither his concept of Eastern civilization nor his criticism of nationalism.¹³ Nonetheless, as a staunch advocate of Asia's cultural unity, Tagore ensured that Chinese studies were taught at his Visva Bharati University in Santiniketan by the invited scholar Tan Yunshan in 1927. In the following years, Tan would emerge as an important diplomatic intermediary between the Guomindang¹⁴ and the Indian National Congress (hereafter INC) and would act as an institution builder, as evidenced by his leading role in establishing the Sino-Indian Cultural Society.¹⁵ The first branch of this society was established in Nanjing in 1933, and an Indian section began its work only one year later at Visva Bharati. This was followed by the foundation of Cheena Bhavana, the Institute of Chinese Language and Culture, in Santiniketan in 1937. The INC and the Guomindang nourished high hopes for both initiatives as they were understood as vital tools of cultural diplomacy between India and China.¹⁶

¹² Framke, 'Vorbild oder Feindbild?', pp. 103–120.

¹³ D. Sachsenmaier, 'Searching for alternatives to Western modernity—cross-cultural approaches in the aftermath of the Great War', *Journal of Modern European History*, vol. 4, 2, 2006, pp. 247–257; Hay, *Asian ideas*, pp. 136–185.

¹⁴ The article generally uses the Pinyin transliteration for Chinese names. However, it follows the Wade-Giles transliteration where it has been used in titles of references and also uses the more well-known Chiang Kai-Shek instead of Jiang Jieshi, for example.

¹⁵ B. Tsui, 'The plea for Asia—Tan Yunshan, Pan-Asianism and Sino-Indian relations', *China Report*, vol. 46, 4, 2010, pp. 353–370; Sachsenmaier, 'Searching for alternatives', pp. 247–248; Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), All India Congress Committee Papers (A.I.C.C. Papers), File N 8/1938, misc. correspondence Lohia, letter by T. Yunshan to R. M. Lohia, 15 March 1938.

¹⁶ Tsui, 'The plea for Asia', pp. 360–361; U. Das Gupta, 'Sino-Indian studies at Visva-Bharati University: Story of Cheena-Bhavana, 1921–1937', in *Tagore and China*, T. Chung et al. (eds), Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 65–71; NMML, A.I.C.C. Papers, File 39/Foreign Department, Newsletter No. 16, 22 April 1937.

Closer relations between Indian and Chinese politicians were also established outside the cultural realm, for instance during the Brussels Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism in 1927. The Brussels Congress had been organized by the German communist Willi Münzenberg with the support of the Communist International (Comintern). It brought together left-wing democrats, socialists, communists, pacifists, trade unionists as well as anti-colonial activists and politicians from Asia, Africa, and Latin America with a view to linking all anti-imperial forces. In order to form a 'united front' against (imperial) exploitation and oppression, the meeting inaugurated a permanent organization, the League against Imperialism (LAI), of which the INC became a member.¹⁷ Utilizing this opportunity to meet, discuss, and envision shared themes, the delegates of the INC and of the Guomindang signed a joint declaration calling for mutual understanding and joint cooperation.¹⁸

Furthermore, in the late 1920s and during the 1930s, the Indian public closely followed internal events in China, as well as the country's conflict with 'Western powers'. Indian politicians and the nationalist media were also concerned with Japan's aggressive foreign policy towards its East Asian neighbour, especially with the so-called Manchurian incident. In September 1931, Japanese troops occupied the city of Shenyang (Mukden) in northeast China in the aftermath of a bomb explosion and subsequently invaded the whole of Manchuria, facing hardly any resistance by the Chinese nationalist troops. The invasion and the following establishment of the Japanese-controlled puppet state Manchukuo was rejected by the League of Nations, which declared Japan the aggressor. However, Manchukuo remained a reality until 1945.¹⁹ Although public discourses in India

¹⁷ M. Louro, 'India and the League against Imperialism: A special "blend" of nationalism and internationalism', in *The Internationalist moment: South Asia, worlds, and world views, 1917–39*, A. Raza, F. Roy and B. Zachariah (eds), Sage, New Delhi, 2015, pp. 22–55; F. Petersson, *Willi Münzenberg, the League against Imperialism, and the Comintern, 1925–1933, Vols 1 and 2*, The Edwin Mellen Press, New York, 2013.

¹⁸ G. Samarani, *Shaping the future of Asia: Chiang Kai-shek, Nehru and China-India relations during the Second World War period*, Lund University, Lund, 2005, pp. 2–4; Stolte, 'Orienting India', pp. 51–55; B. R. Deepak, 'India's political leaders and nationalist China: Quest for a Sino-Indian alliance', *China Report*, vol. 50, 3, 2014, pp. 218–220.

¹⁹ I. S. Friedman, 'Indian nationalism and the Far East', *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 13, 1, 1940, pp. 19–23; T. A. Keenleyside, 'Nationalist Indian attitudes towards Asia: A troublesome legacy for post-independence Indian foreign policy', *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 55, 2, 1982, pp. 220–221. See also the media coverage, for instance in the *Modern Review* and the *Bombay Chronicle*. For the conflict with Britain, see R. Bickers,

contained many critical voices regarding Japanese expansionism, neutral or supporting positions also circulated in the Indian media and were taken up by several Indian politicians and intellectuals. Such pronouncements appeared frequently in pan-Asianist circles that continued to portray Japan as important for the awakening of Asia: Raja Mahendra Pratap and Rash Behari Bose exemplify this stance.²⁰ Labour Asianisms, as envisaged in the international engagements of the Indian trade union movement, and academic Asianisms, which conceptualized Asia as a unitary civilization comprising common spiritual, religious, and cultural identities, provide further examples.²¹ Furthermore, Japan's economic policy was viewed as a role model for India's development,²² while its foreign policy was sometimes interpreted as reflecting a form of 'Realpolitik' that was unavoidable. In adopting this perspective, Indian authors refrained from passing any direct moral or ethical judgements and presented such policies as displaying Japan's essential need for building an empire that would allow it to survive as a nation.²³ Despite its rising militarism, Japan's

Britain in China: Community, culture and colonialism 1900–1949, Manchester University Press, Manchester/New York, 1999, pp. 115–169; T. Buchanan, *East wind: China and the British left, 1925–1976*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, pp. 22–47. For the Manchurian incident and the relationship between Chinese nationalists and communists, see R. Mitter, *Forgotten ally: China's World War II, 1937–1945*, Mariner Books, Boston/New York, 2014, Chapters 2–3; L. Young, 'Imagined empire: The cultural construction of Manchukuo', in *The Japanese wartime empire, 1931–1945*, P. Duus, R. H. Myers and M. R. Peattie (eds), Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996, pp. 71–96.

²⁰ C. Stolte, "‘Enough of the great Napoleons!’ Raja Mahendra Pratap's Pan-Asian projects (1929–1939)", *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 46, 2, 2012, pp. 403–423 (esp. pp. 419–421); Hotta, 'Rash Behari Bose', pp. 116–132; Stolte and Fischer-Tiné, 'Imagining Asia', pp. 65–92. Fischer-Tiné and Stolte argue that 'Japan remained Asia's strongest power and still served as an influential model of modernity. Japanese goodwill missions continued to seek and find audiences in India, and their views on Asia did find their way into the Indian press, often through the mediation of the Indian-born, but naturalized Japanese revolutionary Rashbehari Bose, who published his own monthly journal, *New Asia*. The Indian community in Japan formed an important bridge in this respect, and its most prominent members attended the inauguration of the Great Asia Association in Kobe in 1938' (p. 71).

²¹ Stolte, 'Orienting India', Chapters 2 and 3; Stolte and Fischer-Tiné, 'Imagining Asia', pp. 65–92; C. Stolte, 'Bringing Asia to the world: Indian trade unionism and the long road towards the Asiatic Labour Congress, 1919–1937', *Journal of Global History*, vol. 7, 2, 2012, pp. 257–278.

²² M. Framke, *Delhi—Rom—Berlin: Die indische Wahrnehmung von Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus, 1922–1939*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 2013; M. Visvesvaraya, *Reconstructing India*, P. S. King and Son, London, 1920.

²³ M. Husain, *The quest for empire: An introduction to the study of contemporary expansionist policy of Japan, Italy and Germany*, Asutosh Press, Dacca, 1937; T. Das, 'German-Japanese

importance in uniting Asia also continued to preoccupy Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore, who visited Japan for the third and last time in 1929, grew more and more disenchanted with Japanese aggression in China in the following years. Although, he still believed in the message of Asia and even expressed his sympathy for the Japanese people, Tagore unequivocally denounced Japan's expansionism after its invasion of the Chinese mainland in 1937 and the outbreak of an all-out war.²⁴

As in Tagore's case, the Second Sino-Japanese War ended, or at least severely interrupted for a number of years, most 'sympathetic' pronouncements as well as almost all ongoing projects for Asian unity and solidarity in India. Japanese pan-Asianist ideas ceased to be seen as role models in India.²⁵ However, after the outbreak of the Second World War, and even more so after the Sino-Japanese conflict became part of it in 1941, Indian nationalists increasingly saw Japan as a potentially important ally for the Indian freedom movement.²⁶ At the same time, for the majority of nationalist politicians, intellectuals, and so forth, China remained a vital partner for (future) cultural and political cooperation: the downtrodden 'friend' with whom India needed to side in the common battle against imperialist suppression.²⁷ A series of mutually planned and realized visits as well as Indian publications on China strengthened this view

alliance', *Modern Review*, vol. 51, 2, 1937, pp. 137–144. Similarly, V. D. Savarkar, president of the Hindu Maha Sabha, understood Japanese expansionism in terms of 'Realpolitik' in 1938: NMLL, V. D. Savarkar Papers, misc. correspondence, Jan. 1938–May 1939, press statement, undated, issued by Hindu Mahasabha Office Bombay Branch.

²⁴ Hay, *Asian ideas*, pp. 316–322; R. Tagore, 'Letter to R. B. Bose—10 October 1937', 'Letter to Y. Noguchi—1 September 1938', 'Letter to R. B. Bose—24 October 1938', in *Selected letters of Rabindranath Tagore*, K. Dutta and A. Robinson (eds), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, pp. 485–486, 496–499 and 501–502.

²⁵ Stolte, *Orienteering India*, p. 198.

²⁶ The most famous example is Subhas Chandra Bose. But Srinivas Iyengar, too, viewed Japan as a partner in India's struggle for independence. Furthermore, members of the Indian expatriate communities living in China sided with the pro-Japanese government of Wang Jingwei in the Japanese-occupied areas: see A. M. Saklani, 'Nehru, Chiang-Kai-shek, and the Second World War', in *India and China in the colonial world*, M. Thampi (ed.), Social Science Press, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 168 and 175.

²⁷ K. Chatopadhyaya, *In war-torn China*, Padma Publication, Bombay, 1942, pp. xv–xvi; J. Nehru, *China, Spain and the war*, Kitabistan, Allahabad and London, 1940, pp. 16–21.

of a close connection between the two countries.²⁸ Additionally, India expressed its solidarity with China by sending humanitarian aid in the form of an Indian medical mission in 1938. This mission was by no means the first Indian engagement in international humanitarian assistance. It was, however, the most overtly political humanitarian engagement thus far, as the following section will demonstrate.

International Indian humanitarianism before 1938

Indian initiatives to provide humanitarian assistance during international conflicts were first launched in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1899, when war broke out between England and the two Boer republics—the Transvaal and the Orange Free State—Mohandas K. Gandhi, who was working as a lawyer in South Africa at the time, aligned himself unhesitatingly with the British empire and formed an Indian Ambulance Corps to assist wounded soldiers.²⁹ Gandhi's efforts were not organized in India but

²⁸ Chatopadhyaya, *In war-torn China*; Nehru, *China, Spain and the war*, pp. 21–45; Saklani, 'Nehru, Chiang-Kai-shek', p. 172; NMLL, A.I.C.C. Papers, File G-40/Tai Chi Tao's tour of India; West Bengal State Archives (WBSA), Intelligence Files, 21/1938, File 221/38: 'Letter by J. Nehru to Madame Sun Yat-sen, 2 February 1940'; K. C. Chan, 'Britain's reaction to Chiang Kai-shek's visit to India, February, 1942', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 21, 2, 1975, pp. 52–61; T. Yang, 'Chiang Kai-shek and Jawaharlal Nehru', in *Negotiating China's destiny in World War II*, H. van de Ven, D. Lary and S. R. MacKinnon (eds), Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2015, pp. 127–140. Jawaharlal Nehru visited China in August and September 1939 but was forced to discontinue his trip due to the outbreak of the Second World War. In 1940, Dai Jitao, member of the Executive Committee of the Guomindang and the Supreme Council of National Defence toured India on a cultural goodwill mission, partly organized by the INC. Furthermore, the All-India Women's Conference decided in 1940 during its annual meeting to send a delegation to China. Believing in the international relevance of the proposed mission Jawaharlal Nehru approached Madame Sun Yat-sen to meet the delegation. The visit, however, did not materialize. Finally, in 1942 Chiang Kai-shek visited India as an official guest of the British Indian government. As his principal aim was to win (nationalist) India's active participation in the war, during his stay Chiang met, among others, Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi. His efforts, however, were in vain, as the INC stuck to its policy of not actively aiding the British during the war.

²⁹ P. K. Datta, 'The interlocking worlds of the Anglo-Boer war in South Africa and India', in *South Africa & India: Shaping the global South*, I. Hofmeyr and M. Williams (eds), Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2011, pp. 56–81; J. Hyslop, 'Gandhi 1869–1915: The transnational emergence of a public figure', in *The Cambridge companion to Gandhi*, J. M. Brown and A. Parel (eds), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011, pp. 30–50.

in South Africa. However, the next Indian humanitarian initiative involved dispatching several medical missions from South Asia to Turkey. In 1912, after the outbreak of the Balkan wars, Indian civil society actors—mostly members of the Indian Muslim community—collected funds to send these missions to the Ottoman empire to help wounded soldiers and refugees.³⁰

In the First World War, India fought on the side of Great Britain and its contributions in terms of men, materials, and money became a crucial source to draw on for the Allied powers. While soldiers of the British Indian Army served in Europe, Africa, and Asia, extensive Indian humanitarian initiatives emerged to help wounded military and civilian war victims in Great Britain, Mesopotamia, and India.³¹ In London, Gandhi decided to set up an Indian Field Ambulance Training Corps that was to assist Indian victims in Europe. In India, the Indian St John Ambulance became highly active. In cooperation with the British Red Cross Society, it provided help to prisoners of war. Besides financial and material contributions to different national Red Cross societies, the association also set up and equipped hospitals in India, Great Britain, and France, and sent ambulance units to East Africa and Mesopotamia. In its activities, the St John Ambulance was supported not only by donations from British people living in India, but also from wide sections of upper and middle-class Indian civil society.

The nature of Indian humanitarianism during the Great War was closely intertwined with the imperial framework, a characteristic that was to change in the interwar period. An early instance of planned political humanitarianism in an international conflict (which was, however, never implemented) occurred in 1927. The ongoing Chinese national revolution had challenged Britain's formal presence in China. Britain's reaction—dispatching the Shanghai Defence Force, which also included Indian soldiers—was heavily criticized by the

³⁰ S. T. Wasti, 'The Indian Red Crescent mission to the Balkan wars', *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 45, 3, 2009, pp. 393–406; Z. Ozaydin, 'The Indian Muslims Red Crescent Society's aid to the Ottoman State during the Balkan war in 1912', *Journal of the International Society for the History of Islamic Medicine*, vol. 2, 4, 2003, pp. 12–18.

³¹ S. Das, '“Indian sisters! . . . Send your husbands, brothers, sons”: India, women and the First World War', in *The women's movement in wartime: International perspectives, 1914–19*, A. S. Fell and I. Sharp (eds), Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, 2007, pp. 18–37; K. Roy (ed.), *The Indian army in the two world wars*, Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2012; S. Hyson and A. Lester, '“British India on trial”: Brighton military hospitals and the politics of empire in World War I', *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 38, 2012, pp. 18–34.

INC.³² The latter condemned the British use of Indian troops and money for what it perceived as imperialist action and decided to send an ambulance corps to China.³³ Preparations were already well underway when the Government of India, in agreement with London, refused to grant the ambulance corps the necessary passports, secretly fearing that the proposed medical mission would serve political purposes by being used ‘as a demonstration against the British policy in China’.³⁴ Although this first instance of politically motivated humanitarianism could not be realized, humanitarian help in armed conflicts and civil wars developed into an area of engagement for the Indian nationalists. While fighting for India’s independence, in the course of the 1930s the INC and civil society actors provided ideological support as well as financial and material humanitarian assistance to Abyssinia and the Spanish Republic.³⁵ The eventual dispatch of an Indian medical mission, however, only materialized in connection with a conflict taking place in Asia.

Boycott and medical help

Since 1931, the two powers, China and Japan, had fought intermittently in localized engagements. In 1937, however, these conflicts turned into a full-scale war between the Japanese empire and the Republic of China governed by Chiang Kai-shek’s Guomindang,

³² When speaking about the ‘Indian National Congress’ in this article, I refer to the officially stated policy of the Congress, announced in resolutions and public statements. The application of this term does not suggest understanding the INC as a monolithic block that did not consist of various political and social factions with conflicting opinions. Furthermore, it does not imply that all Congress members were actively involved in the humanitarian campaign for China. The same qualification applies when referring to the policies of the British government in London and the British Indian government in Delhi.

³³ B. Prasad, *The origins of Indian foreign policy*, Bookland Private Limited, Calcutta, 1960, pp. 73–74.

³⁴ British Library (BL), Asia, Pacific, and Africa Collections (APAC), IOR/L/PJ/6/1941, ‘Telegram from Viceroy to Secretary of State for India, 3 July 1927’; BL, APAC, IOR/L/PJ/6/1941, ‘Letter from Secretary to Government of India, Home Department to T. C. Goswami, 3 August 1927’.

³⁵ Framke, *Delhi—Rom—Berlin*, pp. 249–257; NMML, A.I.C.C. Papers, File FD/1936, Foreign Department Newsletter No. 12, 5 February 1937; NMML, Jawaharlal Nehru Papers (JNP), Subject Files, Writings/Speeches, statement No. 285, 22 November 1938; NMML, JNP, Individual Coll., Vol. 33, letter to Senor Del Vayo, 21 November 1938.

which entered into an alliance with the Chinese communists. The war, which began with a local conflict near Beijing (known as the Marco Polo Bridge Incident), ushered in four years of Chinese resistance against an expanding enemy, before it became part of the global Second World War, following Japan's simultaneous attacks on Pearl Harbor and European colonies in Southeast Asia in 1941.³⁶

After the outbreak of all-out war between China and Japan, the INC quickly sided with the Chinese people. In October of the same year, the All India Congress Committee issued a resolution condemning Japan's 'imperialist aggression' and declaring its sympathy with China. In so doing, the Congress displayed, according to William Kuracina, its belief in the 'commonality of anti-imperialist struggles which implied the Congress's favouring any nationalist movement striving against a foreign exploiter'.³⁷ Applying this notion of commonality to both the Guomindang and the Communist Party of China, the official INC discourse—decisively shaped by Jawaharlal Nehru³⁸—did not differentiate between these two major Chinese forces fighting the Japanese. The resolution of the All India Congress Committee also called upon the Indian people to boycott Japanese goods as a sign of their solidarity with China.³⁹ Indian newspapers and journals widely discussed the appropriateness of this boycott. Different Indian nationalist politicians and journalists such as Jawaharlal Nehru, K. F. Nariman, and S. A. Brelvi supported the idea time and again.⁴⁰

³⁶ See, among others, Mitter, *Forgotten ally*; Special issue 'China in World War II, 1937–1945: Experience, memory, and legacy', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 54, 2, 2011; M. Peattie, E. Drea and H. van de Hen (eds), *The battle for China: Essays on the military history of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937–1945*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2011; S. MacKinnon, D. Lary and E. Vogel (eds), *China at war: Regions of China, 1937–45*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2007; H. van de Ven, D. Lary and S. R. MacKinnon (eds), *Negotiating China's destiny in World War II*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2015.

³⁷ W. F. Kuracina, 'Colonial India and external affairs: Relating Indian nationalism to global politics', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, vol. 42, 6, 2007, p. 523.

³⁸ Although one cannot deny Nehru's decisive role in shaping the Congress's foreign policy, we have to take into account that international affairs, especially the policies of fascist and imperialist countries, were widely discussed during the 1930s not only within the Congress and Congress Socialist Party (CSP) circles but also in the nationalist English press. See Framke, *Delhi—Rom—Berlin*, Chapter 7.

³⁹ n. a., 'The All India Congress Committee, Calcutta—29 October to 31 October 1937', in *The Indian annual register, Vol. II 1937*, H. N. Mitra (ed.), Gian Publishing House, New Delhi, 1990, p. 323.

⁴⁰ n. a., 'Appeal for world-wide boycott of Japanese goods', *Modern Review*, vol. 63, 1, 1938, p. 103; n. a. 'Is it Japan's reply to boycott?', *Modern Review*, vol. 63, 1, 1938, p. 119; n. a., 'Boycott Japanese goods', *Times of India*, 27 September 1937, p. 10; J. D.

Their appeals seemingly met with success as Indian import figures of Japanese goods decreased substantially.⁴¹

One can argue that the efforts of the INC to bring about a boycott of Japanese commodities, and thereby express solidarity with China, were part of a global network of protest activities against Japan's aggression.⁴² This is hardly surprising when taking into account that the official stance of the INC towards external affairs in the 1930s was linked to ideas and transnational mobilizations on the political left. The rise of fascist and new imperialist powers, their expansion in the interwar period, and the 'weak' responses of the great powers lastingly influenced the Congress's emergent foreign policy. While dissociating itself officially from Britain's foreign policy, the Congress also became increasingly disillusioned with the League of Nations.⁴³ The League embodied, as Mark Mazower convincingly argues, an influential brand of imperial internationalism. Its imperial dimension led to widespread distrust in India of the League's political aims and seems to have strengthened Indian engagements in alternative forms of internationalism, such as in global networks of humanitarianism and left-wing solidarity.⁴⁴ Rejecting the League's concept of collective

M., 'Reader's letter: China day', *Times of India*, 14 January 1938, p. 6; n. a., 'Boycott Japanese goods', *Times of India*, 9 July 1938, p. 12; Editorial, 'For or against Japan?', *Times of India*, 19 June 1939, p. 8; J. Nehru, 'The need for help to China—9 January 1938', in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru (SWJN)*, Vol. 8, S. Gopal (ed.), Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1976, p. 735; J. Nehru, 'The situation in India—21 June 1938', in *SWJN*, Vol. 9, S. Gopal (ed.), Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1976, p. 22.

⁴¹ NMML, A.I.C.C. Papers, File G-29/Report on China, China Campaign Committee, International Newsletter, 4 November 1938. In the first seven months of 1937, India imported Japanese goods worth 147 million yen, but in the same period in 1938, the import value of Japanese products decreased to 93 million yen.

⁴² For the British boycott of Japanese goods but also for activities in other European countries, see especially A. Clegg, *Aid China 1937–1949: A memoir of a forgotten campaign*, New World Press, Beijing, 1989; T. Buchanan, "'Shanghai-Madrid axis'?" Comparing British responses to the conflicts in Spain and China, 1936–39', *Contemporary European History*, vol. 21, 4, 2012, pp. 537–539.

⁴³ Kuracina, 'Colonial India and external affairs', pp. 517–532; T. A. Keenleyside, 'Origins of Indian foreign policy: A study of Indian nationalist attitudes to foreign affairs, 1927–1939', PhD thesis, University of London, London, 1966, pp. 67–82; N. Owen, *The British left and India: Metropolitan anti-imperialism, 1885–1947*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007, pp. 235–251; M. Framke, 'International events, national policy: The 1930s in India as a formative period for non-alignment', in *The non-aligned movement and the Cold war: Delhi—Bandung—Belgrade*, N. Mišković, H. Fischer-Tiné and N. Boškowska (eds), Routledge, London/New York, 2014, pp. 37–56.

⁴⁴ M. Mazower, *No enchanted palace: The end of empire and the ideological origins of the United Nations*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2008, pp. 17–19 and Chapter 2; E. Manela, *The Wilsonian moment: Self-determination and the international origins of*

security, which evidently perpetuated the imperial world order, the INC repeatedly expressed its sympathy with victims of fascism and imperialism and, as a result, launched solidarity campaigns for Abyssinia and the Spanish Republic. Especially in the latter case, the mobilization of Indian nationalist solidarity, displayed by boycotts, appeals, and humanitarian aid, was pursued by the same actors and partly within the same (leftist) networks of transnational activism.⁴⁵ The humanitarian endeavours for China, therefore, reveal continuities with preceding Indian campaigns for ‘victims’ of imperialism and fascism.

The forging of the global network of protests against Japanese aggression can be seen in the nature of the correspondence from this period. For instance, Nehru received a telegram from John Dewey, Albert Einstein, Bertrand Russell, and Romain Rolland exhorting the Indian people to join their anti-Japanese protest.⁴⁶ In his answer to Dewey—publicized in the Indian press—Nehru reaffirmed the Congress’s willingness to participate in the global cause ‘for humanity, peace and democracy everywhere’.⁴⁷ Nehru, whose interest in foreign policy matters dated back to the 1920s, was well connected with European (especially British) political and intellectual circles.⁴⁸ A few of these connections had emerged from Gandhi’s global networks; however, the majority of his contacts had been developed and/or deepened during his European stay in 1926–27 and in the course of his work for the League against Imperialism.⁴⁹ During his European trip in the summer of 1938, Nehru not only repeatedly discussed

anticolonial nationalism, Oxford University Press, New York, 2007, pp. 77–97 and 159–175; Framke ‘International events, national policy’, pp. 37–56.

⁴⁵ See footnote 35.

⁴⁶ n. a., ‘Appeal for world-wide boycott’, p. 103.

⁴⁷ Ibid. NMMML, A.I.C.C. Papers, File 30/Press statement China, issued by Jawaharlal Nehru, 18 December 1937.

⁴⁸ J. M. Brown, ‘Jawaharlal Nehru and the British empire: The making of an “outsider” in Indian politics’, *South Asia*, vol. 29, 1, 2006, pp. 73–75; Owen, *The British left*, pp. 235–241 and 247–251; M. Louro, ‘Rethinking Nehru’s internationalism: The League against imperialism and anti-imperial networks’, *Third Frame*, vol. 2, 3, 2009, pp. 79–86. Nehru’s correspondence and networks were, however, not confined to Europe but also included non-European politicians and activists (see his *Selected Works*; Louro, ‘Rethinking Nehru’s internationalism’, pp. 86–93; and Petersson, *Willi Münzenberg*, Vol. 1, pp. 216–217).

⁴⁹ Louro, ‘India and the League against imperialism’; Petersson, *Willi Münzenberg*. Nehru was introduced to Romain Rolland by Gandhi in 1926. His relationship with the French writer and activist deepened over the next years due to their shared views on anti-fascism and anti-imperialism. See J. Nehru, ‘To Romain Rolland’, in *SWJN*, Vol. 2, S. Gopal (ed.), Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1972, pp. 230–231; R. A. Francis,

the question of boycotting Japanese goods, but he also further disseminated the idea of showing global solidarity with the victims of imperialist and fascist aggression.⁵⁰

Another example is the participation of Indian nationalists in demonstrations and solidarity meetings for China that were organized in Britain. One of Nehru's closest associates in Europe, V. K. Krishna Menon, played a particularly important role in these activities. In 1929, Menon had organized the India League, an organization that was campaigning vigorously for India's independence in the United Kingdom during the 1930s and which increasingly combined forces with the Communist Party of Great Britain.⁵¹ Menon became involved in humanitarian relief activities, first in connection with the Spanish Civil War and subsequently for China. He was active in different British and international organizations that leaned (strongly) towards the left and/or pacifist milieu and which had taken up China's cause, such as the China Campaign Committee (CCC) and the International Peace Campaign.⁵² He participated in many protest meetings as well as fundraising campaigns in the United Kingdom by delivering speeches and organizing cultural events in support of China.⁵³ On

'Romain Rolland and Gandhi: A study in communication', *Journal of European Studies*, vol. 5, 1975, pp. 291–307, here pp. 298 and 306.

⁵⁰ J. Nehru, 'Interview to the press—29 June 1938', in *SWJN*, Vol. 9, p. 30; J. Nehru, 'Greetings to Spain and China—17 July 1938', in *ibid.*, p. 77; J. Nehru, 'Spain, China and India—31 July 1938', in *ibid.*, pp. 91–92. Nehru's ideas of collective security in the shape of a united peace front constituted, however, only one school of thought among others circulating in the Congress: see Owen, *The British left*, pp. 249–251.

⁵¹ For Krishna Menon and the India League, see S. Chakravarty, *V. K. Krishna Menon and the India League 1925–47*, 2 vols, Har-Anand, New Delhi, 1997; Owen, *The British left*, pp. 241–247. For his relationship with British intellectuals, see B. Moscovitch, 'Harold Laski's Indian students and the power of education, 1920–1950', *Contemporary South Asia*, vol. 20, 1, 2012, pp. 40–41.

⁵² Clegg, *Aid China*; Buchanan, "Shanghai-Madrid axis"; Buchanan, *East wind*. The CCC was founded in London in August/September 1937 and brought together different groups interested in displaying solidarity with China and working for its relief, such as the League against Imperialism, the Friends of Chinese People, the Union of Democratic Control, and the Left Book Club. The International Peace Campaign was part of the peace movement and worked for the revival of the League of Nations and collective security. As the British branch of a French-based movement, the International Peace Campaign championed communist ideas.

⁵³ Clegg, *Aid China*, pp. 21, 26, 77 and 127; BL, APAC, IOR/L/PJ/12/323, 'Extract from New Scotland Yard report, No. 100, 6 October 1937', 'Extract from New Scotland Yard report, No. 136, 8 March 1939', 'Extract from New Scotland Yard report, No. 145, 12 July 1939'; BL, APAC, IOR/L/PJ/12/451, 'Extract from New Scotland Yard report, No. 115, 4 May 1938'; BL, APAC, IOR/L/PJ/12/293, 'Report about Nehru's address to the Left Book Club, 6 July 1938'.

these occasions, Menon often passed on the greetings of the INC and explained its policy towards the Sino-Japanese War to British audiences. Unofficially representing the INC, and Nehru in particular, Menon acted as a transnational broker, bringing certain metropolitan and colonial groups closer together—as is revealed by, among other things, the financial support of the Indian medical mission by the CCC.⁵⁴

In India, in September 1937, January 1938, and July 1938, the Congress organized solidarity days for China in different cities to which Chinese diplomats were invited as speakers.⁵⁵ Indian help for China did not end there. Direct bilateral appeals from China to India—both at institutional and individual levels—were also made.⁵⁶ General Zhu De of the Eighth Route Army, for instance, wrote to Nehru in November 1937 asking for Indian support and noted the national significance for India of such support. The general reminded Nehru that a Japanese victory could become a threat to India's independence.⁵⁷ He explained:

We know that we are fighting not only the battle of the Chinese nation and the Chinese people but we are fighting the battle of the people of all Asia, and that we are a part of the world army for the liberation of oppressed nations and oppressed classes. It is with this consciousness that we feel justified in asking you, [...] to help us in our struggle by any and all means. We would welcome financial help in the name of the Chinese Volunteers, we would welcome medical supplies and surgical instruments, we would welcome trained war surgeons and nurses and we would welcome volunteers who might wish to express their solidarity with us in our fight by fighting in volunteer units with our army.⁵⁸

Having been directly petitioned by various Chinese leaders, Nehru felt it necessary to extend Indian support. As a result, the Congress started a China Relief Fund, organized by its Foreign Department.

⁵⁴ WBSA, Intelligence Files, 21/1938, File 221/38: 'Special Cable: Medical unit for China. Send off to Dr. Atal, 14 July 1938'.

⁵⁵ NMML, A.I.C.C. Papers, File 39/Foreign Department, Newsletter No. 26, 30 September 1937; n. a., "'China day' in Bombay", *Times of India*, 8 July 1938, p. 12; K. N. C., 'An appeal from China', *Modern Review*, vol. 63, 1, 1938, p. 113.

⁵⁶ n. a., 'How to help China', *Modern Review*, vol. 63, 1, 1938, p. 103; Nehru, 'The need for help to China', p. 735; K. N. C., 'An appeal from China', p. 113; 'Letter by A. Smedley to J. Nehru', in *A bunch of old letters: Written mostly to Jawaharlal Nehru and some written by him*, J. Nehru (ed.), Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1958, p. 250.

⁵⁷ 'Letter by C. Teh to J. Nehru—26 November 1937', in Nehru (ed.), *A bunch of old letters*, pp. 250–252.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

Although the Chinese had asked for comprehensive assistance, including military support, the INC decided to focus on the delivery of medical supplies—as did organizations in Britain.⁵⁹ At the same time, Indian politicians and public leaders also discussed the idea of sending an Indian medical mission to China. Having received quite a number of applications for such a mission,⁶⁰ the Congress initially hesitated to organize it, foreseeing ‘very great difficulties in the way of sending volunteers’.⁶¹ Expenditure was clearly a major concern—whether enough money could be raised to equip, send, and maintain the unit.⁶²

The decision to send an Indian medical mission to China—comprising a fully equipped ambulance, medical supplies, and five Indian doctors—was finally made by the Working Committee of the INC in May 1938. Aware that the collection of substantial funds was vital, Congress president Subhas Chandra Bose called upon his fellow countrymen to donate liberally.⁶³ To further ensure the success of the fundraising campaign, the INC actively strove to mobilize its institutional and human resources. Thus, a number of circulars were sent to the provincial Congress committees instructing them to organize collections for China.⁶⁴ Likewise, in the course of two solidarity days held for China in June and July 1938, appeals were made for donations and collection processions were carried out by Congress workers and *Desh Sevikas*.⁶⁵ The fundraising campaign proved successful and by the end of July more than the necessary

⁵⁹ NMML, A.I.C.C. Papers, File 30/Press statement China, issued by J. Nehru, 18 December 1937; J. Nehru, ‘Letter to R. Tagore—9 January 1938’, in *SWJN*, Vol. 8, p. 734; Nehru, ‘The need for help to China’, p. 735. For British initiatives to deliver medical humanitarian help to China, see Buchanan, *East wind*, pp. 74–79.

⁶⁰ For the applications, see NMML, A.I.C.C. Papers, File F38/1937, Chinese Relief Fund; WBSA, Intelligence Files, 21/1938, File 221/38. The applicants often referred to newspaper reports about the alleged despatch of the Congress mission.

⁶¹ NMML, A.I.C.C. Papers, File F38/1937, Chinese Relief Fund, Letter by A.I.C.C. to R. S. Ghosh, 3 February 1938.

⁶² NMML, A.I.C.C. Papers, File 8/1938, misc. correspondence Lohia, Letter by the C. T. Feng to R. M. Lohia, 15 March 1938; NMML, A.I.C.C. Papers, File G5/Correspondence Nehru, Letter by R. M. Lohia, 21 March 1938.

⁶³ NMML, A.I.C.C. Papers, File P-1/1938, A.I.C.C. circulars to P.C.C., Press statement by S.C. Bose, 27 May 1938, and Press statement by S. C. Bose, 27 June 1938.

⁶⁴ NMML, A.I.C.C. Papers, File P-1/1938, A.I.C.C. circulars to P.C.C., Circular No. 5 by General Secretary, n. d.; Circular No. 6 by General Secretary, 6 June 1938; and Circular No. 7 by General Secretary, 28 June 1938.

⁶⁵ n. a., ‘India’s sympathy for China’, *Times of India*, 14 June 1938, p. 13; n. a., ‘China day’, *Times of India*, 8 July 1938, p. 12; n. a., ‘Calcutta meeting: Processionists collect money’, *Times of India*, 8 July 1938, p. 12.

amount of Rs 30,000 had been collected in India.⁶⁶ Aside from the money raised by the provincial and district Congress committees, the Chinese Relief Fund received donations directly from (industrial) companies; trade unions; cultural, political, youth, and workers societies; schools and colleges, and also from individuals, among them Rabindranath Tagore, who contributed the generous amount of Rs 500.⁶⁷ While a large share of the donations came from within the subcontinent, Indian communities living in Southeast Asia also answered the Congress's call, donating not only money but also an ambulance.⁶⁸ Finally, an amount of £500 in support of the Indian medical mission was raised in Great Britain during and after Nehru's visit there in summer 1938. Among the donors were British-China support groups, along with different Indian societies, such as the Federation of Indian Students in Great Britain and the Indian Medical Association, as well as Asian students' bodies like the Oxford and Cambridge Majlis.⁶⁹ Here again, one can see that Indian humanitarian initiatives were embedded in wider global and transnational networks.

The administration of the funds and the organization of the medical unit were entrusted to a committee appointed by the Working Committee of the INC in May.⁷⁰ Since the Congress had already received quite a number of applications for the mission before any official call went out, and after it became clear that it would only be possible to send a small batch of people, the committee now invited

⁶⁶ n. a., 'Congress Chinese Ambulance unit', *Times of India*, 30 July 1938, p. 20; n. a., 'Medical mission to China', *Times of India*, 1 September 1938, p. 12. Additionally, medicine and medical equipment were donated for the mission to take to China: see n. a., 'Medical unit sails for China', *Bombay Sentinel*, 2 September 1938, p. 9; K. A. Abbas, ... *And one did not come back! The story of the Congress medical mission to China*, 4th ed., Sound Magazine, Bombay, 1944, pp. 17–18.

⁶⁷ Lists of donors can be found in: NMML, A.I.C.C. Papers, File F38/1937, Chinese Relief Fund, here especially 'List of donors for China Relief Fund' and 'List of Donors for China Relief Fund—Second Installment'; WBSA, Intelligence Files, File 21/1938, File 221/38: 'Extract from A.B.P., dated 1.8.38'; J. Nehru, 'To R. Tagore—9 January 1938', in *SWJN*, Vol. 8, p. 734.

⁶⁸ NMML, A.I.C.C. Papers, File F38/1937, Chinese Relief Fund, Letter by R. M. N. S. Pillay to S. C. Bose, 24 June 1938; K. A. N. Aiyer, 'Ambulance for China', *Modern Review*, vol. 64, 1, 1938, pp. 116 and 118.

⁶⁹ J. Nehru, 'Letter to S. C. Bose—14 July 1938', in *SWJN*, Vol. 9, p. 58; n. a., 'Jawahar on India's sympathy for China', *Bombay Chronicle*, 16 July 1938, p. 7; n. a., *Times of India*, 1 September 1938, p. 12.

⁷⁰ n. a., 'The working committee proceedings, 15–19 May 1938', in *The Indian annual register*, Vol. I 1938, H. N. Mitra (ed.), Gian Publishing House, New Delhi, 1990, pp. 323–324. The members of the organizing committee were: Dr Jivaraj Mehta, Dr Sunil Chandra Bose, Dr R. M. Lohia, G. P. Hutheesing, and Subhas Chandra Bose.

applications for just four ‘qualified doctors, preferably experienced surgeons [...] willing to serve for at least one year’⁷¹ without any salary. By the end of July the candidates had been selected from nearly 700 applications received ‘from all over India, East Africa, Mauritius, Syria and England’.⁷² These four doctors were: M. R. Cholkar from Nagpur, D. S. Kotnis from Sholapur, and B. K. Basu and D. Mukherjee from Calcutta.

The committee appointed Dr Madan Mohan Lal Atal to be the leader of the mission. He seemed particularly qualified for the position as a result of his work for the Spanish Medical Aid Committee—a left-wing organization supporting the Republican side—during the Spanish Civil War. This work had not only provided him with crucial experience in cooperating with a humanitarian organization in armed conflicts, but it had also made him the ideal candidate in political terms.⁷³ Personally close to Jawaharlal Nehru and a faithful supporter of the INC, Atal’s activities in Republican Spain (and later in China) were driven as much by humanitarian considerations as by his leftist anti-fascist sentiments. He was one of the few Indians actively involved in ‘the global Popular Front’.⁷⁴

⁷¹ NMML, A.I.C.C. Papers, File P-1/1938, A.I.C.C. circulars to P.C.C.: Press statement by S. C. Bose, 27 May 1938. The INC promised to take care of expenses for equipment, room, and board in China and also to give a small allowance to the doctors. It seems that, originally, there had been hopes that it would be possible to send a bigger unit that would have included stretcher-bearers, compounders, dressers, etc. Due to a lack of finances, however, the committee decided to concentrate, for the moment, on the despatch of surgeons (NMML, A.I.C.C. Papers, File F38/1937, Chinese Relief Fund, Letter by R. M. Lohia to S. C. Bose, 1 April 1938; WBSA, Intelligence Files, 21/1938, File 221/38: ‘Extract from interception—Letters by R. M. Lohia, 9 June 1938’). All applications received by the Congress were forwarded to the organizing committee (WBSA, Intelligence Files, 21/1938, File 221/38: ‘Extract from interception—Letter by R. M. Lohia, 21 May 1938’).

⁷² n. a., *Times of India*, 30 July 1938.

⁷³ WBSA, Intelligence Files, 21/1938, File 221/38: ‘Extract from interception—Letter by R. M. Lohia, 27 May 1938’ and ‘Special Cable—Medical Unit for China. Sent off to Dr. Atal, 14 July 1938’. For Atal’s experiences in Spain see: ‘From our correspondent, “Epic stand: Dr. Atal’s impressions of the Spanish struggle”’, *Bombay Chronicle*, 15 August 1937, p. 10; ‘From our own correspondent, “Fascist attempt on Indian doctor’s life”’, *Bombay Chronicle*, 24 February 1938, p. 8. For the Spanish Medical Aid Committee see: M. Alpert, ‘Humanitarianism and politics in the British response to the Spanish Civil War, 1936–9’, *European History Quarterly*, vol. 14, 1984, pp. 423–440; G. Pretus, *Humanitarian relief in the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939)*, The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, 2013, pp. 230–231.

⁷⁴ ‘From our own correspondent’, *Bombay Chronicle*, 24 February 1938, p. 8; n. a., ‘Medical unit sails for China’, *Bombay Chronicle*, 2 September 1938, p. 9. For further information on the ‘global Popular Front’ and other individuals who were closely

The British government, both in Great Britain and in India, closely monitored the international interconnectedness of the Congress's humanitarian efforts with leftist, communist, and pacifist groups as well as individuals.⁷⁵ On the subcontinent, India's colonial intelligence branches intercepted the correspondence of Congress members regarding the mission and anxiously gathered information about the applicants. Of particular interest was the question of whether the applicants for the medical unit had previously been politically active or even been convicted. The anxiety of the colonial state, however, did not stop there. In a precautionary measure, it also made enquiries about whether certain former detainees had conveyed interest in the mission.⁷⁶ Although these activities indicate a growing concern about the unwelcome politicization of the medical mission within British-Indian government circles, the colonial state did not prevent the unit's despatch this time around. However, it did intervene in one case. Its suspicions that Indian communists might exploit the mission and use it as an opportunity to go to China led the central government in Delhi to involve itself in the decision of the Congress-led government in Bombay to withhold granting a passport to Dr Ranen Sen, an active member of the Communist Party of India. In his place Dr Bijoy K. Basu, who was himself a Communist Party member, was selected to join the mission. The available sources do not elucidate this conundrum, but two explanations seem likely.⁷⁷ Either Basu's affiliation with the communists was unknown to the British administration in charge, and/or he was not as high profile and influential a party member as Sen and thus appeared as less a threat to the colonial state.⁷⁸ The limited intervention by the British Indian government in the despatch of the Indian medical mission seemed

involved in helping the Spanish and Chinese cause, see Buchanan, 'Shanghai-Madrid Axis'. Dr Atal was a cousin of Nehru's wife Kamala and accompanied her to Europe in the mid-1930s for medical treatment: J. M. Brown, *Nehru: A political life*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2003, p. 111.

⁷⁵ WBSA, Intelligence Files, 21/1938, File 221/38; BL, APAC, IOR/L/PJ/12/451; BL, APAC, IOR/L/PJ/12/293; BL, APAC, IOR/L/PJ/12/323.

⁷⁶ WBSA, Intelligence Files, 21/1938, File 221/38.

⁷⁷ WBSA, Intelligence Files, 21/1938, File 221/38: 'Copy of letter No. 798-B/1077, 14 February 1939' and 'Copy of an I. B. Memo No. 20692, 8 July 1938'; B. K. Basu, *Call of Yanan: Story of the Indian medical mission to China, 1938-43*, All India Kotnis Memorial Committee, New Delhi, 1986, n. p.

⁷⁸ The Government of India learned of Basu's 'communist leanings' only after his return from China in 1943: BL, APAC, IOR/L/PJ/7/6312, 'Telegram XX No. 5899 from New Delhi to Ambassador Chungking, 21 July 1943'.

to be closely linked to the growing strength of the Congress in the 1930s. Its success in the 1937 elections for the provincial governments not only showed that the Congress enjoyed considerable support by the general public, but it also facilitated its further emergence as a 'parallel government'⁷⁹ and helped translate its claims that it was pursuing a distinct Indian foreign policy leading to concrete initiatives of political humanitarianism.

The Indian medical mission in China

A large number of citizens, politicians, and Chinese representatives attended the departure of the mission that sailed from Bombay to Hong Kong in September 1938.⁸⁰ Initially, the unit was supposed to remain in China for one year. While Mukherjee and Cholkar returned to India in 1939, it soon became clear that Atal, Kotnis, and Basu would stay longer (until 1940, 1942, and 1943 respectively).⁸¹ Thus, the INC endeavoured to collect further funds to support its work but met with limited success.⁸²

⁷⁹ D. A. Low, *Britain and Indian nationalism: The imprint of ambiguity 1929–1942*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997, Chapters 6 and 7. For a comprehensive analysis of the INC emerging as a parallel government in the 1930s, see W. F. Kuracina, *The state and governance in India: The Congress ideal*, Routledge, London 2010, pp. 23–30.

⁸⁰ n. a., *Bombay Sentinel*, 2 September 1938, p. 9; n. a., 'We fight for liberation of humanity', *Bombay Sentinel*, 1 September 1938, p. 5.

⁸¹ Abbas, . . . *And one did not come back!*, pp. 87 and 108; WBSA, Intelligence Files, 21/1938, File 221/38: 'Intercepted letter by D. Mukherjee to D. Bannerji, 15 August 1939', 'Copy of newspaper article, Hindusthan Standard, 24 June 1940', 'Extract from Hindusthan Standard, 5 July 1943'.

⁸² Additional donations became necessary due to the individual decisions of the doctors to continue their work in China but also because of further Chinese appeals for help after the outbreak of the Second World War which made any procurement of medical supplies from Europe difficult. However, it seems that only limited financial funds were available or could be collected. After his return to India, and with the help of the INC, D. Mukherjee collected further medical supplies in late 1939. However, he was not able to bring them to China himself, as his passport was taken from him in Rangoon and he had to return to India. He delivered the medical supplies to the Chinese consul in Rangoon. J. Nehru, 'Medical mission to China—8 April 1939', in Nehru (ed.), *SWJN*, Vol. 9, p. 250; 'Letter by Madame Sun Yat-sen to Jawaharlal Nehru, 15 September 1939', in Nehru (ed.), *A bunch of old letters*, p. 380; WBSA, Intelligence Files, 21/1938, File 221/38: 'Copy of newspaper article, Hindusthan Standard, 4 November 1939', 'Copy of a letter by J. Nehru to D. Mukherjee, 5 December 1939', 'Copy of a letter by J. Nehru to D. Mukherjee, 11 December 1939', 'Intercepted letter by J. Nehru to Madame Sun Yat-sen, 2 February 1940'.

After reaching Hong Kong in mid-September, the mission was received by Chinese government officials and Indian residents. Within the context of several social functions, it met members of the Chinese political establishment, representatives of political and humanitarian organizations as well as other foreigners who actively supported China.⁸³ Perceived as representatives of the INC and at times as ‘ambassadors of goodwill from the people of India’,⁸⁴ the medical mission continued to receive invitations to lunches, dinners, and other festivities held in their honour in the next few months. Its members met, among others, Mao Zedong, Song Qingling (Madame Sun Yat-sen), Song Meiling (Madame Chiang Kai-shek), Zhu De, Zhou Enlai, Lin Sen, and Dai Jitao. They furthermore made the acquaintance of British authors Charlotte Haldane and Freda Utley as well as the American journalists Agnes Smedley and Edgar Snow.⁸⁵ The doctors passed through different places held by the Guomindang and took up work in military, municipal, and Red Cross hospitals in Yichang and Chongqing.⁸⁶

However, their final destination for service was Yan’an, seat of the communists, which the unit eventually reached in early 1939. While Cholkar and Mukherjee started teaching in the Medical College of Yan’an, Atal, Kotnis, and Basu ran a new hospital known as the Eighth Route Army Model Hospital.⁸⁷ Keen to help the Chinese victims of war, the members of the medical mission were happy to work under the auspices of the Chinese National Red Cross, which supposedly had a better reach into the Chinese-held areas.⁸⁸ After different assignments at the front and in mobile medical units, Basu was employed as surgeon-in-charge of the ‘Ear Nose Throat and Eye’ department in the International Peace Hospital in Yan’an, while Kotnis started teaching at the Bethune International Peace Hospital

⁸³ Abbas, ... *And one did not come back!*, p. 25.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33, 47–54, 62, 65–67, 93 and 105–106.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 57 and 69.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁸⁸ Clegg, *Aid China*, p. 56; A. Smedley, *Battle hymn of China*, Victor Gollancz Ltd, London, 1944, p. 162; n. a., ‘Spain will never submit to fascism’, *Bombay Sentinel*, 2 August 1938, p. 4. This arrangement had been made between the Chinese government and the INC before the departure of the mission. Initially, the doctors were supposed to serve in Changsha. The plan was, however, changed after their arrival in China when Yan’an became their destination: WBSA, Intelligence Files, 21/1938, File 221/38: ‘Extract from interception—Letter by C. T. Feng to R. M. Lohia, 26 June 1938’.

and Medical School near Fuping. He also became the director of this institution in 1941.⁸⁹

The International Peace hospitals were situated in China's northwest border regions. This area not only saw heavy fighting against the Japanese but was supposedly in particular need of support as it did not receive much aid from the Chinese government. They were established and maintained by funds from the United States, Canada, and Britain which were collected by organizations such as the CCC and Madame Sun Yat-sen's China Defence League. To a certain extent these hospitals were internationally linked leftist hubs—not just in regard to finances but also to its personnel. Alongside the members of the Indian medical mission, doctors, nurses, and miscellaneous personnel from Canada, the United States, Austria, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and other countries provided politically informed humanitarian help in China. Some of these humanitarians—just like Atal—had already gained experience in the Spanish Civil War.⁹⁰ The work of the Indian medical mission in China can therefore be understood as an integral part of the global political humanitarianism of the late 1930s and early 1940s—a humanitarianism that was characterized by its strong leftist, anti-imperialist attributes.

Beyond humanitarianism? Indian motives for assisting China

The Indian medical mission spawned a significant legacy in terms of the bilateral relations between China and India. In this context, particular emphasis is put on Dwarkanath Kotnis who is nowadays best remembered in both countries.⁹¹ As soon as the conflict came to an end, Kotnis, who had died of epilepsy in China in late 1942 while on duty, quickly emerged as a martyr to the anti-fascist cause and as a symbol of the bond of solidarity between India and China.⁹² To

⁸⁹ Abbas, ... *And one did not come back!*, pp. 97, 108–110, 112, 116, 118, 121 and 124.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 85 and 98; China Defence League, *In guerrilla China: A report of China Defence League*, China Aid Council, New York, 1943, pp. 6, 9–11, 16–26; Clegg, *Aid China*.

⁹¹ V. Lal, 'Framing a discourse: China and India in the modern world', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 10 January 2009, p. 41.

⁹² Abbas, ... *And one did not come back!*, pp. 10 and 128; China Defence League, *In guerrilla China*; p. 8.

this day Chinese politicians remain keen to visit Kotnis's household during state visits to India.⁹³ This raises the issue of how the value of this humanitarian initiative and its reach was assessed by Indian and Chinese politicians, which brings us to the question of the motives for its organization.

In the 1930s, Jawaharlal Nehru emerged as one of the influential voices that explained and framed the foreign policy ideas of the INC. Humanitarian help was part of these political formulations on foreign policy. Reviewing the international situation, Nehru believed that a 'world conflict is going on in which democracy is pitched against imperialism and fascism',⁹⁴ in which Japanese imperialism stood against the political emancipation and freedom of China.⁹⁵ As India was siding uncompromisingly with the democratic forces against the powers of imperialism and fascism—a theme that Nehru dwelt upon repeatedly in his speeches and writings⁹⁶—all possible support and assistance had to be given to China. In China itself, the cultural and religious heritage the country shared with India was equally flagged as a reason to help.⁹⁷

While these motives most probably influenced the decision of the INC and motivated Indian donors to contribute to the Chinese Relief Fund, Nehru was also aware of the political benefit that India's initiative could produce.⁹⁸ During his stay in Europe in the summer of 1938, he reported back to the Working Committee of the INC in India that 'the decision by us to send a medical mission has had the happiest results'.⁹⁹ By pointing to the important global role that China would be likely to play in the future, Nehru suggested further increasing

⁹³ P. D. Wadia, 'Dr. Dwarakanath Kotnis', *Times of India*, 9 December 1956, p. 5; Lal, 'Framing a discourse', p. 41; S. Biswas, 'Why is India's Dr Kotnis revered in China', in *BBC News India*, 21 May 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-22599356>, [accessed 24 October 2017].

⁹⁴ Nehru, 'The need for help to China', p. 734.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 734–735.

⁹⁶ J. Nehru, 'Greetings to Spain and China—17 July 1938', in *SWJN*, Vol. 9, p. 77; J. Nehru, 'Why India supports China—21 August 1938', in *SWJN*, Vol. 9, pp. 209–210; Friedman, 'Indian nationalism', pp. 23–26.

⁹⁷ J. Nehru, 'India and the world perspective—31 May 1938', in *SWJN*, Vol. 8, p. 641; J. Nehru, 'China and India—7 July 1938', in *SWJN*, Vol. 9, p. 56.

⁹⁸ J. Nehru, 'Letter to J. B. Kripalani—24 August 1938', in *SWJN*, Vol. 9, p. 116.

⁹⁹ J. Nehru, 'Note to the Working Committee—1 August 1938', in *SWJN*, Vol. 9, p. 104. Nehru received messages of solidarity for the Indian medical mission to China from Romain Rolland and the World Student Association (BL, APAC, IOR/L/PJ/12/293, 'Report on Jawaharlal Nehru, 25 October 1938').

Indian contacts with its neighbour.¹⁰⁰ In a letter to J. B. Kripalani, he proposed that the medical mission should be accompanied by someone who would take care of establishing political contacts and reporting on the mission's work back in India. Nehru explained: 'A mission of doctors alone will be very one-sided and will not do us as much good as we ought to expect. [...] the main thing is intelligent political contacts with prominent people there.'¹⁰¹ In the end, his proposal was not implemented. Finally, he was convinced that the humanitarian mission to China would serve the foreign propaganda efforts of the Indian National movement.¹⁰² To further substantiate these efforts, the humanitarian help was usually depicted as a matter that concerned every nationalist-minded Indian and was therefore important for every INC member. Nehru embedded Indian humanitarianism in the political realm and attached a range of possible positive results to the medical aid delivered to the Chinese victims of the war. One of the most obvious benefits stemmed from the aforementioned Chinese appeal for help to the Indian nationalists, and especially the request for military support, which allowed the Congress to engage in international affairs. By providing (humanitarian) aid to another country, the Congress's representatives, and especially Jawaharlal Nehru, acted as if they were the de facto representatives of a sovereign nation state, well before India actually became independent. This episode displays once again the 'parallel government' that Congress had been able to establish by the late 1930s.

While not everybody in the Congress shared Nehru's strongly anti-fascist stance, replete with ideas of collective security and India's envisaged responsibility for it,¹⁰³ there seems to have been a broader consent on the necessity of humanitarian assistance. Thus, even acting Congress President Subhas Chandra Bose—whose foreign policy approach in the late 1930s focused on India's self-interest and who sought to keep all options open—participated actively in aid efforts for China. Bose was aware that the practical value of the Indian medical mission was limited, but he credited it with a moral value during a meeting in Calcutta in mid-August 1938. Pointing to India's own problems, he declared: 'We are painfully conscious of the fact that we can do very little to help China in her present difficulties. But we have

¹⁰⁰ Nehru, 'Note to the Working Committee', p. 104.

¹⁰¹ Nehru, 'Letter to J. B. Kripalani', p. 116.

¹⁰² J. Nehru, 'Help to China and Spain—3 January 1939', in *SWJN*, Vol. 9, p. 225.

¹⁰³ Owen, *The British left and India*, pp. 248–251.

our heart with the Chinese people and as a token of our sympathy we are sending out a small medical mission to China.¹⁰⁴ Shortly before the departure of the unit, however, Bose also linked India's humanitarian efforts with politics by writing in a press statement: 'It is not a small thing that India is appearing on the international stage today as a bulwark against forces of imperialism, autocracy and spiritual wickedness. [...] Let us, therefore, [...] pray for the success of their [the units, M.F.] noble mission.'¹⁰⁵

Although the humanitarian contribution of the Indian national movement never amounted to more than this one medical mission in the course of the 1937–1945 war, it seems that it, at least partially, achieved its humanitarian, moral as well as political goals. The immediate bilateral consequences of a mission that was highly appreciated in China was the increased correspondence that emerged between Nehru and Chinese politicians, from both the communist and nationalist camps,¹⁰⁶ as well as mutual visits and plans for closer cooperation between India and China in the areas of economics, politics, culture, and education.¹⁰⁷ Mao Zedong thanked Nehru and the INC personally for their medical and material aid in a letter in May 1939 and expressed his hope '[...] that in future the INC and the Indian people will continue to help and aid us and thus together drive out the Japanese imperialists'.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, the nationalist and communist Chinese press frequently ran articles on the situation in British India that supported the Indian independence movement during the Second World War.¹⁰⁹

In the years following the end of the war, independent India and the newly established People's Republic of China (PRC) continued to foster the pre-existing relations, thereby repeatedly emphasizing

¹⁰⁴ n. a., 'Medical mission to China: Mr. Bose on moral value', *Times of India*, 15 August 1938, p. 9.

¹⁰⁵ WBSA, Intelligence Files, 21/1938, File 221/38: 'Press statement: Mission of service and love, undated'.

¹⁰⁶ For the extended correspondence see, among others: *SWJN, Vols 10, 12 and 13*, S. Gopal (ed.), Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1977–1980; NMML, JNP, Individual Coll., Vol. 12, Chiang Kai-Shek and Vol. 13, Madame Chiang Kai-shek.

¹⁰⁷ See footnote 28.

¹⁰⁸ NMML, JNP, Individual Coll., Vol. 45, Letter by Mao Tse-tung, 24 May 1939. For further examples of Chinese appreciation see: NMML, JNP, Individual Coll., Vol. 95, Letter by Soong Ching Ling, 16 December 1939; n. a., 'Indian Medical Unit to China: Tribute to its work', *Times of India*, 14 July 1939, p. 13.

¹⁰⁹ B. R. Deepak, 'India-China relations 1905–1947: An era of anti-imperialist struggle', PhD thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, 1996, Chapter 6.

their long-standing close links, their shared Asian heritage, and their friendship based on the common anti-imperialist struggle.¹¹⁰ Both countries closely cooperated and/or supported each other on multiple occasions, such as the PRC's admission to the United Nations, the Korean War, the Indochina question, the Bandung Conference, and so on.¹¹¹ Apart from pointing to their interlinked past, the language of this cooperation was not only framed in terms of friendship and commonalities of problems, but initially it also drew heavily on pan-Asian concepts of Asian unity and power, and was directed against a new kind of 'imperial internationalism' that emerged in the context of decolonization and the Cold War.¹¹² One way of countering this new imperial internationalism lay in the continuation of aid by the post-colonial Indian government. Thereby, the mixture of motives attached to aid provision during the 1930s—its political and moral dimensions—remained important in Nehru's and the Congress's conception of relief work as well as development assistance after independence.¹¹³ In the late 1940s and early 1950s, India's foreign policy aims comprised, in Nehru's words, striving for world peace, combating racism and imperialism, reviving Asia, and the politics of non-alignment.¹¹⁴ Accordingly, when Nehru became India's first prime minister, the country provided both diplomatic and material support for the Indonesian fight for independence by despatching a medical

¹¹⁰ S. Quanyu, 'Sino-Indian friendship in the Nehru era: A Chinese perspective', *China Report*, vol. 41, 3, 2005, p. 246; I. Abraham: 'From Bandung to NAM: Non-alignment and Indian foreign policy, 1947–65', *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, vol. 46, 2, 2008, pp. 195–211. Interestingly, most works on early Indian-Chinese political relations after the Second World War hardly engage with their pre-history in the 1930s and during the Second World War and therefore do not elaborate on the importance of Indian political humanitarianism.

¹¹¹ Quanyu, 'Sino-Indian friendship', pp. 237–252; Abraham, 'From Bandung to NAM', pp. 195–211; S. W. Khan, 'Cold War co-operation: New Chinese evidence on Jawaharlal Nehru's 1954 visit to Beijing', *Cold War History*, vol. 11, 2, 2011, pp. 197–222.

¹¹² Khan, 'Cold War co-operation', pp. 197–222; Mazower, *No enchanted palace*, Chapter 4; C. Stolte, "'The Asiatic hour': New perspectives on the Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, 1947", *The non-aligned movement and the Cold war: Delhi—Bandung—Belgrade*, N. Mišković, H. Fischer-Tiné and N. Boškowska (eds), Routledge, London/New York, 2014, pp. 57–61.

¹¹³ For early post-colonial development aid, see: S. Chaturvedi, 'India's development partnership: Key policy shifts and institution evolution', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, vol. 25, 4, 2012, pp. 558–559.

¹¹⁴ J. Nehru, 'Note on Foreign Policy, 2 December 1948', in *SWJN, Vol. 8, 2. Ser.*, S. Gopal (ed.), J. Nehru Memorial Fund, New Delhi, 1989, pp. 325–328.

mission with large supplies of medicine to Indonesia.¹¹⁵ Similarly, during the Korean War India sent a medical unit to South Korea to help the victims of war. The country, however, refrained from giving any military assistance to South Korea, as requested by the United Nations.¹¹⁶ These examples seem to suggest that in the early post-independence years, Indian humanitarian assistance was motivated not only by political ambitions, such as pursuing an independent foreign policy that was not aligned to any of the emerging power blocs and which highlighted India's potential as a regional power, but it was also influenced by a sense of anti-imperialist solidarity with former colonies and a moral concern to work for a peaceful, just global order.

Despite the Chinese appreciation of the Indian medical mission and the close cooperation between the two Asian countries in the late 1940s until the mid-1950s, Indian-Chinese relations had deteriorated noticeably by the end of the decade, culminating in the Sino-Indian War in 1962.¹¹⁷ The war left Nehru disillusioned and with a sense of betrayal. Neither the long-cherished belief in Asia's unity and power nor the idea of India's and China's common cultural and political (anti-imperialist) heritage, which had once informed the work of the Indian medical mission, had been able to prevent the collapse of Chinese-Indian friendship due to regional and international geostrategic and foreign policy differences. Yet, in the decades following the war, the Indian medical mission emerged again as a 'token' of Indian-Chinese friendship. Its legacy of mutual sympathy and support has been—and still is—invoked regularly by both governments to reinforce present and future bilateral relations.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ B. Ghoshal, 'India and the struggle for Indonesian independence', *Akdemika*, vol. 54, 1, 1999, pp. 105–130.

¹¹⁶ K. C. Wahn, 'The role of India in the Korean War', *International Area Review*, vol. 13, 2, 2010, pp. 26–27.

¹¹⁷ L. Lüthi, 'Sino-Indian relations, 1954–1962', *Eurasia Border Review*, vol. 3, Summer, 2012, pp. 95–119.

¹¹⁸ n. a. 'China commemorates the 50th Anniversary of the Indian medical mission to China', *China Report*, vol. 25, 1, 1989, pp. 87–93; Y. Sun, 'Speech on the Book release: My life with Kotnis', in *Website of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of India*, no date, <http://in.china-embassy.org/eng/ssygd/zzyhn/zyhde/t269628.htm>, [accessed 29 July 2016]; P. Mukherjee 'India-China relations: 8 steps to a partnership of the people', in: Press Information Bureau, Government of India, President's Secretariat, 26 May 2016, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=145679> [accessed 24 October 2017].

Conclusion

In a recent article, the historian Vinay Lal claims that Kotnis and the Indian medical mission, while being still highly venerated in China, have been all but forgotten in India.¹¹⁹ If we give credence to his assertion, the Indian medical mission would have shared the fate of many humanitarian initiatives of the 1930s that have faded into obscurity and/or have been ignored by the recent historiography on humanitarianism.¹²⁰ However, in our case, Lal's judgement seems to be an oversimplification—not only when thinking about the mission's diplomatic legacy. Over the last seven decades, numerous books have been published about the medical unit and in particular about Dwarkanath Kotnis, starting with Khwaja Ahmad Abbas's 1944 account ... *And one did not come back!*.¹²¹ Based on Abbas's novel, the Indian director V. Shantaram made the movie *Dr. Kotnis ki amar kahani/The immortal tale of Dr. Kotnis*, which became one of India's most celebrated films. Shot in 1946, the movie contributed substantially to the remembrance of the Indian medical mission and even created, as Neepa Majumdar argues, 'in the public mind and in subsequent scholarly and popular accounts [...] a complete blurring of the boundaries between Dr. Kotnis and Shantaram's Kotnis [...]'.¹²² Furthermore, the famous and widely circulated comic book series *Amar Chitra Katha* published a title called *Doctor Kotnis in China* in 1984. The *Amar Chitra Katha* comics were usually published in English and then translated into Hindi and occasionally into other regional languages.¹²³ Thus, in the 1980s, a generation of Indian children who grew up with *Amar Chitra Katha* comics became familiar with the story of the Indian medical mission. Nonetheless, despite these

¹¹⁹ Lal, 'Framing a discourse', p. 41.

¹²⁰ See the subtitle of Clegg's monograph 'A memoir of a forgotten campaign': Clegg, *Aid China*; Pretus, *Humanitarian relief*, pp. xiii–xiv.

¹²¹ See, among others, Abbas, ... *And one did not come back!*; M. S. Kotnis, *The bridge for ever: A biography of Dr. Kotnis*, Somaiya Publications, Bombay, 1982; G. Liang, *Dr. Kotnis: A short biography*, S. Sen Gupta (ed.), New Book Centre, Calcutta, 1983; Basu, *Call of Yanan*; G. Quinglan, X. Baojun and B. R. Deepak, *My life with Kotnis*, Embassy of the People's Republic of China in association with Manak, New Delhi, 2006; H. Dauharia (ed.), *The immortal stories of Dr. D. S. Kotnis and Dr. Norman Bethune*, Unistar Books, Chandigarh, 2012.

¹²² N. Majumdar, 'Immortal tale or nightmare? Dr. Kotnis between art and exploitation', *South Asian Popular Culture*, vol. 6, 2, 2008, p. 146.

¹²³ F. W. Pritchett, 'The world of Amar Chitra Katha', in *Media and the transformation of religion in South Asia*, L. A. Babb and S. S. Wadley (eds), Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 77–78.

'cultural' forms of engagement, the mission has thus far largely escaped scholarly attention as a significant example of Indian political humanitarianism.

As the article has shown, different Indian actors and groups—in our case, especially members of the Indian national movement—discussed and actively engaged in humanitarian initiatives in the interwar period. These initiatives aimed to bring relief to victims of the conflict taking place in China since 1937. They also signified a shift in Indian pan-Asianism. For many Indian leaders and thinkers, the outbreak of the war discredited Japan's appeal as both a pioneer of Asian solidarity and a role model for many nationalist-minded people in India. At the same time, the same conflict strengthened Indian relations with China, especially in the arena of transnational humanitarian solidarity.

Nationalist protest, the emergent 'parallel government' of the INC, and multiple forms of expanding internationalisms provided a changed framework for British India in the 1930s, unravelling the tension created due to its colonial status, on the one hand, and its 'independent' posturing on international platforms and in organizations, on the other. While the British Indian government officially formulated India's foreign policy, often in consultation with London, Indian nationalists rejected Delhi's stance on international matters many times. Although being listed on international bodies as a country with a 'free voice', most importantly in the League of Nations, members of the Indian national movement did not feel represented there and dissociated themselves from any involvement in an imperial internationalism, which proved antithetic to their own international ambitions. Instead, the INC built connections and cooperated with international networks and pressure groups, for instance in the field of humanitarian assistance and left-wing solidarity during the Second Sino-Japanese War. By creating and implementing its own humanitarian programme, the Congress not only attempted to orchestrate a politics of moral superiority for itself, but also, by using this humanitarian initiative as a political instrument to chart out an independent vision of foreign policy, the Indian medical mission to China became a tool for India's emancipation.