

The China Gadabouts

New Frontiers of Humanitarian Nursing, 1941–51

Susan Armstrong-Reid



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Introduction

[The Friends Ambulance Unit] was an agency through which members of the Society of Friends and like-minded persons carry into action their deepest religious convictions and insights ... Through relief service we are able to express our sense of responsibility for and unity with our fellow human beings. We feel we need to bring food, clothing, and shelter to those in distress, but far more important than even such vital material assistance is the opportunity to share the burden of suffering of another, to help restore his sense of self-respect and integrity, and to restore his faith in love and good-will through a practical demonstration of human sympathy and brotherhood. Convinced of the error of the way of violence, Friends seek to make love the basis of their relationships with others.

– FAU SERVICE CONTRACT

On 18 April 2014, the Chinese government opened an exhibition at the 8th Route Army Museum in the city of Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, to commemorate humanitarian work performed over seventy years earlier by the Society of Friends Ambulance Unit (FAU) and its successor after 1947, the Friends Service Unit (FSU).¹ It was a surprising overture, considering the passage of time and the small size of the FAU's China section, commonly known as the China Convoy. The opening remarks of Zheng Yulin, director of the Xi'an Municipal Administration for Cultural Heritage, explained the exhibit's purpose:

We would like to share these stories with all the people whose lives and happiness today were made possible by the sacrifices of the China Convoy and their colleagues. Through these precious and moving images, we can commemorate [their] brave deeds ... in rescuing Chinese wounded soldiers and

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civilians in those terrible times, and feel the scars made by brutal war and the healing through the humanitarian activities and the perseverance and kindness of these individuals. The history is passed, but showing what happened is to commemorate the hard-earned peace and to enlighten thinking about history and the present, war, peace, life and its purpose.²

This was the first time the Chinese public had been made aware of the Convoy's humanitarian activities. More remarkably, other exhibits have continued to spread the stories of their shared cultural heritage; the next held in Yan'an, the cradle of Revolutionary China, is currently scheduled for the fall of 2017.

Going to China as a conscientious objector in the 1940s was not for the faint-hearted. The dangerous transport job and arduous medical work claimed the lives of seven idealistic young men. This book considers the confluence of two separate yet intertwined stories. It is the history of the China Convoy's humanitarian endeavours at a pivotal moment in China's social and structural revolutions and today's humanitarianism. Understanding how Convoy members framed their humanitarian action and, in turn, were profoundly changed by their experience deepens our understanding of the continuing ethical dilemmas of acting humanely, impartially, and neutrally across borders and cultures to ensure basic human security.

Mining archival collections, untapped diaries, letters, interviews, memoirs, private and official photo collections, and film footage, this book selected nurses' experiences to shed new light on the Convoy's pacifist principles, culture, and struggles to realize its transnational pacifist vision. The lived experiences of nurses provide a window into the tangled professional and political relationships that underpinned the Convoy's humanitarian actions. Nurses witnessed every aspect of the cultural shift to reconcile the Convoy's pacifist beliefs and medical work with the gruesome reality of war-ravaged China, yet historical accounts privilege the narrative of the Convoy men in traditionally gendered roles as conscientious objectors, leaders, physicians, medical mechanics, and truck drivers.³

Despite the constraints that class, gender, place, and race imposed on their life choice, nurses exercised agency to advance their lives personally and professionally. This book examines how humanitarian work gave meaning to women's lives as nurses and as private individuals, and how they carved out personal and professional space despite a chaotic, unfamiliar, and sometimes hostile environment, to create a sense of home and belonging. The

history of the Convoy nurses is not only the history of the nurses themselves and, by association, humanitarian nursing as a contested concept. It is about women's historically constructed place in the historiography of global society that marginalizes their contributions and power. This volume is the first comprehensive study that critically interrogates the multi-faceted and contested agency exercised by Western and Chinese nurses in the China Convoy's humanitarian efforts from 1941 to 1951.

Physicians' stories and accounts provide an important counterpoint throughout the book, however. Although their experiences were intertwined, nurses were subject to different biases, discriminations, and challenges. Male physicians' narratives reveal nurses' gendered and sometimes racialized place within this Western humanitarian organization. Those of female physicians expose women's gendered experiences across professional lines. I have attempted to find nurses' voices as women, alongside and in relation to the Convoy men, to understand how gender and professionalism defined and shaped the Convoy's history. Physicians' accounts spotlight the tensions across cultural and professional boundaries that nurses were expected to manage, many of which extended well beyond bedside matters. In addition, the historical narratives of nurses, especially those of Chinese nurses, were often refracted or embedded in accounts written by men for family members or for the Convoy's newsletters. While these must be read with the intended audiences in mind, they evidence the agency, professional identity, and nation-building role of Chinese nurses.

This book raises questions of why a small group of Westerners were chosen by the Chinese government in 2014 to be captured in China's cultural memory. Members viewed the Convoy as distinctive from larger Western groups, especially missionary groups with a longer history of working in China. Their humanitarianism, Convoy members claimed, was driven by compassion and their desire to help relieve human suffering, regardless of race, nation, or religion. Subscribing to the Quaker Peace Testimony, their goal was to model global fraternity rather than impose their religious beliefs on others. They maintained that their practice of impartiality and their indomitable faith in the victory of the human spirit over violence could provide the basis for peace. That view, foregrounding the China Convoy's compassion and neutrality, was reflected in Zheng Yulin's opening remarks at the 8th Route Army Museum quoted above. Moreover, in recognition of their long tradition of providing neutral and impartial assistance, the China Convoy's sponsors, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and the British Friends Service Council

(BFSC), were jointly awarded the 1947 Nobel Peace Prize. During the Peace Prize presentation ceremonies, the attributes singled out and praised were the same ones pointed to by Convoy members to distinguish their work in war relief and postwar reconstruction.⁴

The China Convoy was born of a spirit of adventure and youthful soul-searching in the hope that it might foster international fellowship and reconciliation in a world at war. Pacifism, the glue that bonded the independent-spirited Convoy members, was their rejoinder to war. Just as war brought them together, “so China was the challenge that kept [them] together.”⁵ China captured their hearts and minds and cemented their enduring ties to each other and to China. The China Convoy has therefore long been regarded within and beyond Quaker circles as a positive example of Quaker humanitarian practice. The perception that it was not just the work but also the ethical way in which it was done gained currency within the Convoy’s ranks⁶ and in A. Tegla Davies’s 1947 official history of the FAU: “One does not come to appreciate China in a day nor to realize that the whole world must not be judged by Western standards. But once the corner was turned, there was no other section of the Friends Ambulance Unit that attained so much character and coherence, so much sympathy and integration with the life of the country in which it served.”⁷ This legacy, however, was forged within the grim reality of the unimaginable suffering, social dislocation, and loss endured by the Chinese people in a country where war never abated.

In this challenging environment, negotiating a distinctly Quaker approach to humanitarian action, premised on a depoliticized model of humanitarian relief, took many turns. Recently historians have produced a more nuanced assessment of the Quakers’ record of impartial global humanitarianism, and at times generated lively debate about inconsistencies in Quaker humanitarian practice.⁸ This book joins these scholarly conversations to better understand the complex politics that enmeshed the China Convoy’s humanitarian efforts. Deepening our comprehension of the Convoy’s humanitarian action sheds light on the contours of and cracks within the nascent modern humanitarian system.

Until recently, moreover, nursing’s voice has also been marginalized in the scholarly literature on the development of the humanitarian system, which prioritizes diplomacy orchestrated by politicians and international bureaucrats. Revisionist scholars challenge, or at least complicate, earlier interpretations of the role of nursing as imperialist cultural aggression.⁹ This book moves beyond merely recovering nurses’ stories as unsung heroes on the periphery

of the history of humanitarianism. Since the emergence of the humanitarian system at the time of the Geneva Convention of 1863, nursing has provided crucial and enduring service in wars and natural disasters, yet the concept of humanitarian nursing is poorly understood. The notion of the humanitarian nurse is a multi-faceted and contentious concept.¹⁰ The origins of humanitarianism are entrenched in the West's colonial and imperial past, especially in faith-based organizations. Nursing has been traditionally cast as part of the wider process of making imperialism more palatable; others ascribe to it a more sinister role as an "agent of empire," imposing Western cultural standards or institutions while undermining local ones.¹¹ This book critically examines how nurses navigated the cultural schism and the mesh of ethical dilemmas, professional challenges, and opportunities presented by humanitarian nursing within a Western-based relief organization.

Nurses' life narratives elucidate the uncertainties and complexities encountered by the Convoy's multinational staff, who were brought together by their pledge to relieve China's suffering. For Connie Bull, as for many other nurses, her China years led her to question her role and contribution within a Western-based humanitarian organization that presumed a "right" way for communities to ensure their survival and that of their members. As she remarked:

I think this is a good place to come to if you ever had any young ideas about changing the world and helping mankind towards a better life. You realize that if there is a God, then in His eyes you and the dirtiest Chinese beggar stand equal, that the coolie and the old woman tottering on bound feet, intent on their own lives, are living out more fully than we [do] the life [that is] ordained for them. By our restless striving towards the ideal, or our unceasing consciousness that we are not seeking the ideal, we so divide ourselves that we can do nothing wholeheartedly.¹²

Recovering Convoy nurses' stories from the field also unsettles accepted interpretations and suggests that a more complex historical portrait of humanitarian nursing is warranted. Their letters, diaries, photos, official reports, and rare published materials offer new perspectives on their identity formation as humanitarian nurses in the intimate contact zone of patient care during wartime. This tantalizing trove provides fresh perspectives on the intersections of power with faith, gender, class, race, and nation that shaped their work and life in the field. Their testimonies illuminate the extraordinary

diversity of Convoy nurses' humanitarian work as it was imagined and practised in war-devastated China. The experiences of Western and Chinese nurses therefore provide a litmus test for humanitarian nursing and, by association, for the iconization of FAU members' cross-cultural humanitarian exchanges in the field as distinct from those of other aid organizations.

At a turning point in Chinese history, the views of Convoy nurses offer a different means of examining the relationship between women and war, and women's political commitment and attitudes towards pacifism and communism. Some nurses witnessed the realignment of power during global war that set the stage for the birth of modern China. Later, others witnessed China's emergence from both sides of the conflict. For some Western nurses, their involvement in China reflected a broader interest in and advocacy of social justice. While nation building was often the path taken by Chinese nurses to achieve that goal, for Western nurses it meant promoting international peace and reconciliation, and sharing their nursing knowledge to relieve human suffering.

In sum, this book explores the historical meaning and development of humanitarian nursing, its current relevance to the profession, and the vibrant global discourse swirling around the perceived failure of contemporary humanitarianism. It illustrates how the politics of impartiality shaped the development of the modern humanitarian system; it is still necessary but is an inadequate foundation of the modern humanitarian system to ensure human security. It raises questions about the fine line between international humanitarian actions as legitimate humanitarian intervention, and a newer cultural or economic imperialism that raises the spectre of a continued militarization of humanitarianism. Beyond these contributions, this book offers implications for the direction of future research on humanitarian nursing across disciplines.

Before exploring how the China Convoy personnel conceived of their work in China, it is useful to start with who they were and what brought them to China. With the outbreak of the Second World War, the British Society of Friends, with assistance from the American Friends Service Committee, reconvened the Friends Ambulance Unit. Former members of the FAU of the First World War had continued to hold reunions; at one such gathering in 1938, plans began to be formulated to launch a new FAU to meet the growing

world crisis.¹³ As in the First World War, it provided conscientious objectors with a state-sanctioned opportunity for humanitarian service as an alternative to military service. Between 1939 and 1946, more than 1,300 FAUers served as unpaid volunteers in Britain, France, Finland, Norway, Egypt, Greece, Syria, Ethiopia, India, and China. FAU membership was never restricted to Quakers, however.¹⁴ The Unit welcomed anyone who adhered to the Quaker Peace Testimony, as exemplified in the principle “Go anywhere, do anything,” or GADA, to relieve suffering, regardless of race, religion, or politics – hence the nickname the “Gadabouts.” When it became clear that substantial funding could not be obtained in England, which was already overwhelmed by demands for relief for victims of the Axis air raids, the American Friends were approached. Since the British and American Quakers had cooperated in the First World War, and intermittently since then, it was natural to rekindle that connection. Like its British counterpart, the AFSC had been formed in 1917 to meet the needs of American conscientious objectors, and then expanded its humanitarian mandate during the interwar era to include peace education and relief activities conducted worldwide on the basis of depoliticized impartiality. As the prospect of a Second World War loomed closer, the AFSC sought safe and meaningful options for alternative service that helped conscientious objectors transcend their feeling of social ostracism.¹⁵ It became an increasingly important source of funds and personnel for the China Convoy and eventually assumed administrative responsibility for its successor, the Friends Service Unit in 1947.

The China section was formed in 1941 after a year of multilateral negotiations between London, Philadelphia, and China.¹⁶ The China Convoy was unique. It was the only section to undertake transport work – hence its name, the China Convoy. Begun as a British operation, it became the most international section in its composition and funding. Over time, Canadians, New Zealanders, Americans, and Chinese, both volunteers and paid staff, swelled its ranks, and their governments and private donors contributed to its coffers. Drawn from all walks of life, with a variety of reasons for joining and a diverse set of beliefs and commitments, they found common refuge in pacifism. The China Convoy “was a great leveller of social distinctions and backgrounds.” Everyone was “in the same boat. They were all expected to perform the same duties and to learn the same skills. Faced with the challenges of hospital and relief work, of driving and motor mechanics, practical skills and gumption were more significant than qualifications or vocabulary.”¹⁷ Women

were recruited later and came with a similar mix of motives and aspirations. Some sought adventure or a new beginning, whereas others sought more meaningful wartime work.

Quaker principles remained embedded in its organizational culture until the China Convoy closed its doors in 1951, but getting the Convoy members' diverse ideals aligned in China was another matter. Renowned as a fiercely democratic, self-critical, and idealistic risk taker, the Convoy always operated at arm's length from its Quaker sponsoring organizations and remained vigilant in preserving its administrative autonomy in the field. The fledgling Convoy soon discovered "what a tough nut we have to crack" in a country riddled with political intrigue and suspicion.¹⁸ While many of its members were eager to share the dangers and work on the front lines during the global war, they were unwilling to sacrifice the Convoy's pacifist principles and financial independence or subsume its distinctive identity.¹⁹ Working with military authorities, the International Relief Committee,²⁰ the Chinese National Health Administration (NHA), or British civilian aid bodies proved fraught with tension. Moreover, building relationships and finding adequate funding in Great Britain, the United States, and eventually Canada would be crucial to its survival. Grumblings about the lack of consultation and honest differences of opinion with those in command back in London and Philadelphia fuelled discontent within the rank and file.

Tensions were rife within the Convoy and beyond; the maverick "China Boys" marched to the beat of their own drum. They blatantly disregarded the authority of London or Philadelphia or of their own leaders more than once. Almost immediately, the rank and file disputed the choice of a Canadian medical missionary, Dr. Robert McClure, to direct its medical and relief work. In 1937, McClure had been seconded from the United Church Mission in Henan to the International Red Cross as field director for Central China. At first glance, the appointment of a missionary seemed out of character for a Quaker organization. Clearly, McClure's extensive knowledge of China and its culture and language, and his impressive political network in China and abroad, took precedence over strict fidelity to Quaker principles. His lifelong attitude that the "wrong decision is better than the right decision too late" proved problematic.²¹ As we shall see, his maverick leadership style would be disputed, but his guiding hand remained evident until 1946. His successors, chosen from the rank and file, learned the job on the ground.

The Convoy's humanitarian endeavours spanned an era in which the Chinese experienced regional war, then global war, then the final stages of a

civil war that culminated in the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. China's wars were nested within each other, like Russian matryoshka dolls, embedded within global conflicts or containing other sub-intrastate conflicts among warlords.

By 1940, the Sino-Japanese War (1937–45) had had a devastating impact on China. War fractured the social fabric. The fighting in the latter half of 1937 triggered massive civilian evacuations and the flight of millions into exile. The Japanese occupied the seaboard provinces of the east and south, while the Chinese Communists controlled the northern provinces. The remaining parts of western and southern China that were not occupied by the Japanese, commonly referred to as "Free China," were landlocked, with restricted supply routes. Braving bandits, disease, and dangerous roads, the transport division of the FAU delivered almost all medical supplies for civilians and famine relief in Free China. Meanwhile, FAU medical personnel on the front lines struggled, often in primitive conditions with makeshift facilities, to carve out a humanitarian enclave as the first Western aid group to work under the Chinese Red Cross and alongside the Chinese army.

The nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 brought a sudden end to the war, and Japan's surrender marked a watershed in the China Convoy's history. The Convoy now shifted its focus from emergency work to undertake a long-term agricultural, industrial, and medical rehabilitation program centred primarily in Henan. Could the FAU and the FSU, its successor after 1947, reinvent the Convoy's mandate in line with its pacifist principles in a very different humanitarian landscape? For eight years the Chinese people had lived in terror and endured unimaginable hardships as their nation was torn apart. Long before the war ended, it was widely recognized that a massive humanitarian relief and rehabilitation task lay ahead. Allied plans were well under way to establish the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) as a bridge to peace that would allow the liberal economic order and democracies to flourish.²² Returning missionary societies and new international aid agencies flooded into China, further complicating the Convoy's humanitarian negotiations.

The formation of the FSU in 1947 coincided with a turning point in the Chinese civil war. Its work was increasingly held hostage by events beyond its control. As the civil war intensified, the Convoy struggled to maintain its integrity and to honour the primacy of the humanitarian imperative to receive and give humanitarian relief. The tenuous wartime truce between the Guomindang led by Chiang Kai-shek and the Communist Party of China led

by Mao Zedong was short-lived. On 1 October 1949, Mao proclaimed the creation of the People's Republic of China.²³ As China entered the final chapter of a vicious civil war, foreign aid workers became increasingly unwelcome. The dictates of the Cold War after 1946 shifted Western aid priorities from multilateral programs under UNRRA's umbrella to "help people to help themselves" to bilateral aid to contain communism. When the FSU could no longer obtain funding and replacement personnel, it reluctantly closed its doors in 1951.

Before interrogating the specifics of the China Convoy's humanitarian endeavours, it is useful to situate it within the tradition of Quaker humanitarianism. What did it mean to give aid in a "Quakerly fashion"? How did Quaker ethics shape the Gadabouts' collective memory of being unique among Western aid groups? What tensions within Convoy ranks resulted from the diversity of opinions on the Quaker Peace Testimony in practice?

Quakers have long been an authoritative force for peace and justice. Over the years, the China Convoy remained open to admitting non-Quakers who shared the Quaker belief in non-violence and peacemaking rooted deep in Quaker convictions about the dignity and worth of all persons. The "inner light" or "inward light," a distinctive theme underpinning their belief that God can be seen in each person, meant that Quakers believed all men were equal and therefore had the right to reach their full human potential. It meant that they did not have enemies and therefore could not kill. This was the essence of the Peace Testimony. It was not a passive peace but one that had to be built on a daily basis on all levels: in the family, in the community, in the nation, and in the world. Quaker beliefs are related to the belief that the direct awareness of God enables each person to discover God's will for him or her. The Quaker ideals of resolving conflict through individual witness and of demonstrating love as a prerequisite for solving human conflicts therefore informed FAU and FSU humanitarianism. It should be kept clearly in mind, however, that while the Convoy as a whole maintained its absolute pacifist position, members were at liberty to act as the "inward light" directed them to in wartime.

Convinced that there were alternatives to war, Quakers – or Friends, as they refer to themselves – had long felt the need to provide a practical demonstration of human sympathy and global fraternity through relief services. The humanitarian imperative that impelled Quakers to alleviate suffering

wherever it was found was designed “to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being.” It also promoted “understanding, friendship, co-operation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.”²⁴ Working for pacifism and belief in the human capacity for goodness were central to Quakers’ humanitarian action. This human capacity for goodness, Quakers believed, had to be fostered through interpersonal action, not proselytization.²⁵ Most Convoy members took a pragmatic approach and distanced their humanitarian endeavours from the work of other, evangelistic missionary groups working in China. In sum, peace for them never meant merely the absence of war but a positive peace predicated on justice and human reconciliation.

Since the ethics of method was as important as the ethics of outcome, members constantly reflected on whether the China Convoy’s humanitarian aid was being delivered in a Quakerly fashion. The Convoy always had to measure its desire to protect its operational space against the imperative to provide impartial aid on the basis of need. By defining their objective as the relief of the individual rather than of the nation, members believed that the China Convoy’s organizational identity as a neutral and impartial pacifist organization could be insulated from the politics of humanitarianism.

For several reasons, humanitarian negotiations were more difficult than the idealistic Convoy volunteers first realized. Other aspects of what is now commonly referred to as “humanitarian space” – broadly understood as the agency’s ability to operate freely and meet humanitarian needs in accordance with the principles of humanitarian action – became evident. The fluidity of their operating environment, particularly the security conditions and the inability of the most vulnerable to reach life-saving aid, constrained their humanitarian negotiations, determining where and how they worked.²⁶ China’s humanitarian terrain was a crowded and contested space, occupied by institutions and actors with competing agendas.

Stories from the field offer perspectives on the ability of relief organizations to provide aid, rehabilitation, and resettlement assistance where humanitarian aid often becomes strangled by bureaucratic red tape, conflicting agendas, and modern warfare. Unit members came to understand that Quaker principles provided a framework for negotiating access to those in need of assistance across political divides but could not ensure the outcome. The China Convoy’s humanitarian ethics, this book argues, proved situational. Ultimately it would be the FAU’s or FSU’s persuasion and relevance in particular locations and times that mattered in the end. This raises two larger questions. First, when allied to the practice of Quaker ideals, can

humanitarian nursing – and, by association, medical humanitarian aid – remain neutral only to a limited degree? Second, was there ever a “golden age” of humanitarian action when independence, neutrality, and autonomy were respected? In so doing, this book challenges the now dominant narrative of a “shrinking humanitarian space,”²⁷ which defines and defends the contemporary humanitarian system more as an interventionist stance to protect human rights and security without the prior consent of a country’s government.

This book also critically examines the tensions, clashes, and compromises between the converging cultures that coloured all the China Gadabouts’ humanitarian exchanges at all levels of the Convoy’s operations. Nurses’ experiences offer an appraisal of what it means to be thrust into chaotic settings armed only with limited professional experience. Humanitarian nursing quickly took all Convoy nurses outside their normal scope of practice. Many found their work frustrating but rewarding as they battled administrative inefficiency, indifference, racism, political intrigue, and sheer pettiness beyond their control. Humanitarian nursing involved negotiating personal and professional space and resolving ethical dilemmas. For some, it was the most powerful experience of their lives; for others, it was a time best forgotten. Hence the coping strategies that the Convoy nurses developed to navigate unfamiliar professional terrain form a thread throughout the narrative that connects their individual, and often very different, stories within the same teams.

Both Western and Chinese nurses discovered that humanitarian relief work was contentious, perilous, and sometimes life-changing. Both were expected to be diplomats, cultural brokers, and purveyors of expert Western nursing services, all without losing sight of the Convoy’s pacifist ethos. Hence, the cross-cultural brokerage role of both Western and Chinese nurses is also a central theme of this book, as is an examination of the way in which both legitimized their work. Did the Western Convoy nurses embody and uphold Western standards of nursing, and how did they vary over time and place? Did they prioritize the China Convoy’s interests over those of the Chinese people? Or was theirs a far more complicated and contested story? Examining the agency, assimilation, and accommodation of Chinese nurses exposes the complexity of the China Convoy’s humanitarian exchanges. Why did Chinese nurses join a Western relief group, and what did they expect in return? How did they perceive their wartime role as modern Chinese women? Why were some nurses more effective cross-cultural brokers than others?

Accordingly, unpacking the China Convoy nurses' collective narratives pushes scholars to re-evaluate nursing's historic role within the Convoy and, by association, its contested contribution in Western-driven humanitarian diplomacy.²⁸

For both Western and Chinese women, joining the China Convoy made it possible to recreate their lives inside and outside of nursing. This book probes how gender as a constructed concept shaped nurses' sense of identity and their work within the Convoy. Gender as an analytical construct, as used in this study, is viewed as socially constructed and embraces men's and women's gendered experiences as humanitarian workers. Even though women had a long history of nursing on the front lines, their place within the Convoy sparked heated debates. Gender identities, especially for Chinese nurses, were sometimes more contested as they straddled traditional Chinese feminine norms and Western professional modernity. This book also pays attention to the gendered experience of men providing nursing services. Until the China Convoy closed its doors, it was taken for granted that men, frequently trained on the spot, would fill key nursing roles. As pacifists, the Convoy men already challenged hegemonic masculinity and "were often constructed as irresponsible and sexually suspect anti-citizens."²⁹ Nursing, as a caring profession, was considered women's work. How were male nurses' experiences in the China Convoy reconciled with prevailing notions of manhood?

Understanding nursing's historic global involvement in health promotion and humanitarian assistance demands a transnational perspective open to engagement across disciplines that no longer privileges the nation state or its predominantly male representatives as a historical paradigm for understanding nursing's past. As the international relations discipline conventionally constructed state identities and citizens' responsibilities, most women's lived experiences were excluded. Recovering nurses' stories challenges the gendered nature of international relations scholarship that relegated women to the sidelines of humanitarian action, and of foreign policy more generally. Collectively, for some feminist historians, their gendered world as humanitarian workers exposes the ragged intellectual edges of our scholarship, mandating more radical revision of how we think and write about global history. I argue that good global nursing history should expose the lacunae in analytical constructs that frame our historical inquiry into humanitarian nursing's historic global presence, suggest new directions for research, and inform the role of nursing in policy formation.

New analyses and theoretical approaches are required to examine the historical work and worth of nursing globally.³⁰ Nurses are often key cultural conduits between Western medicine and traditional medical practitioners. The history of nursing offers an alternative perspective for interrogating how Western-based humanitarian organizations insinuated their culture into the lives of indigenous people. Accordingly, my examination of humanitarian nursing's textured past requires a multidisciplinary approach incorporating cutting-edge trends across disciplines that situate race, class, gender, ethnicity, place, nation, and postcolonialism in a transnational framework. It engages with revisionist investigations, across disciplines, into the contested humanitarian exchanges between privileged Western health workers and their counterparts in conflict-ridden or emergent nations with different political or cultural traditions.³¹ Recently, feminist international relations scholars have argued that nurses were not always agents of cultural imperialism but could be "authentic knowers" who develop cultural sensitivity once in the field.³² Works by cultural anthropologists illuminate the tensions that FAU nurses experienced as cross-cultural brokers³³ and the reasons why some proved more effective humanitarian diplomats than others.³⁴

This book explores the movement beyond a state-centric approach that privileges the nation state and security. Instead, it alters the concept of power to admit nurses' agency and activism in global humanitarian diplomacy. The China Convoy nurses' narratives of their humanitarian work offer fresh perspectives that refocus the boundaries of international relations studies from the causes and cost of war to the drastic consequences the Chinese people suffered due to militarism and oppression. Building on my previous work, I am attracted to the work of international relations scholars that, by distinguishing between "power over" and "power with," questions whether women exercise power differently in global society.³⁵ This enables me to treat seriously nurses' contribution to global civil society, war, and nation building – an area that has been addressed only recently by historians of global nursing and remains invisible in mainstream international relations studies.

Centring human security – commonly understood as freedom from violence to ensure basic food, shelter, health protection, and human rights – instead of national security within a transnational analytical frame better contextualizes the Gadabouts' experience and the enduring trends, ethical ambiguities, and challenges of the modern humanitarian landscape. These transnational frames instead scrutinize how nursing has addressed the opportunities and challenges of disseminating Western-based medical

knowledge, ethics, and resources globally through a wide range of transnational non-state actors. These frames focus scholarly attention on the resilience, cultural awareness, and innovative leadership required for anyone contemplating humanitarian nursing in conflict zones or complex humanitarian crises. They suggest a far more contested and complicated picture of humanitarian nursing, and indicate that, in general, women's role within the global humanitarian landscape has been undervalued.

Good global history reveals the enduring themes, trends, and ethical ambiguities in humanitarianism. A retrospective of the China Convoy's humanitarian endeavours during this transformational era, when what it meant to be a humanitarian was not fully settled, provides important perspectives on the implications of humanitarian neutrality. The adoption of two key documents are watershed moments in the development of humanitarian law. The Geneva Conventions of 1949 updated the regulation of the conduct of armed conflict and sought to limit its effects, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 reinforced the idea that humanitarian action should be based on rights rather than needs. Humanitarian relief implies short-term rather than long-term action. In the period after the Second World War, however, what was intended to prevent imminent harm became transformed into attempts to promote social and economic development and protect citizens. Promotion of economic and social development and peacekeeping appeared to follow provision of humanitarian relief, with the distinction between them becoming increasingly blurred.³⁶

As Baroness Amos, the UN's Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator from 2010 to 2015, contended: "To shape our future, we must understand our past."³⁷ A review of the Convoy's humanitarian endeavours as the new world order was being formulated offers valuable insights for conversations among scholars and practitioners today.³⁸ A stronger engagement with the history of humanitarianism's origins and identity establishes a sounder vantage point from which to engage with those who were shaped by different sets of circumstances.³⁹ Central to the debate on global governance is the militarization that accompanies the "new humanitarianism" predicated on moral and human rights; it means an a priori departure from the basic humanitarian principle of supplying aid on the sole basis of need with prior state consent for any given humanitarian action. As the UN's adoption of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) concept in 2005 attests,³⁹ the global debate increasingly focused on agreement that

the international community has a right, and even a duty, to alleviate distress, and whether acceptable means include forcible intervention to end suffering and protect human rights when a state fails to do so.⁴⁰ The Gadabouts' humanitarian ethics as practised in China contribute to scholarly debate on the overlap between the development of human rights and humanitarianism.⁴¹

The Second World War signalled a change in humanitarianism with the development of new structures and organizations to administer relief and rehabilitation. During their China years, new players entered the “contested humanitarian marketplace.”⁴² Long before the term “nurses/doctors without borders” was coined, the China Convoy attempted to reconcile its humanitarian imperative with the changing face of modern warfare. It also foreshadowed the meteoric rise of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and other non-state actors worldwide, which complicated post-1945 global humanitarian governance.⁴³ This book spotlights an understudied area of global nursing – its role within INGOs, now more active than ever in global health care.

Taking a transnational perspective on global nursing unsettles our parochial assumptions about the invisibility and powerlessness of nursing within the gendered and Western-derived global humanitarian community. Giving voice to nursing's historic contribution to humanitarianism issues a challenge for nurses to be more critically engaged in the global health community today. The stories of humanitarian nursing in China may seem far removed from the concerns of contemporary nursing leaders, but I was struck otherwise in writing this book. Issues that China Convoy nurses confronted remain relevant today: the struggle to build healthcare facilities that are sustainable and tailored to local needs; the battle against agendas driven by political or economic rather than healthcare needs; the dogged leadership and personal resilience required to provide compassionate care and high standards of nursing service in difficult and dangerous circumstances; and the recognition that health and human security are inextricably interwoven. However, if today's nurses are to move beyond a clinical perspective on global health to become human rights advocates and engaged citizens for health for all, our historical inquiry should support them by providing a sound historical understanding of nursing's complex role in global health diplomacy and the socio-economic structural issues that underpin and connect health and social justice. This book takes a modest step in this direction.

Historians face many challenges in trying to understand and write global nursing history. They are sensitive to the ethical and methodological challenges of conducting transnational research.⁴⁴ They have long since abandoned the idea that sources enable us to mirror an objective representation of the totality of nurses' life experiences. They have, for the most part, embraced subjectivity, including their own selection and interpretation of those sources. Quaker accounts written for family and friends may have prioritized different issues than those written by conscientious objectors of other denominations. Memory has become an inescapable feature of the historical landscape.⁴⁵ Scholars must display sensitivity to both the advantages and disadvantages of using private recollections or published "redemptive narratives" that paint a positive portrait of wartime humanitarian nursing.⁴⁶ With one significant exception, the photographic record and the official publicity film footage that create historical memory of the Convoy's humanitarian work were taken and preserved by Convoy men. Moreover, women's contributions, especially those of the Chinese nurses, are often embedded in male narratives. These sources nonetheless reveal societal norms as Convoy men depict nurses' life stories. Fortunately, nurses' private diaries, poetry, letters, and reports written at the time, accompanied by two redemptive narratives, provide a counterpoint to male accounts of Convoy life in the field. These sources reveal their authors' attempts to preserve recollections or rationalize their presence as the events evolved. Despite these limitations, they bring to life the voices and vastly different experiences of nurses seldom evoked in official records or caught in the colourful Convoy newsletters portraying and celebrating life in China. Taken together, they provide a window to interrogate how Quakers perceived their social interaction in wartime China as being distinct from that of Christian missionaries or other international aid agencies. Oral interviews conducted afterwards, vetted against other primary sources, can shed light on the complexity of larger events or themes, revealing far greater contours or nuances in their agency or presence than previously realized. They are essential for situating individual nurses' perspectives within the organization for which they worked and within the global political context.⁴⁷ Incorporating oral and personal testimonies into historical writing enables me to convey the major ethical and personal challenges of humanitarian nursing in a more relatable manner for scholars, practitioners, and others interested in the relationships between peace, global health, social justice, and human security.⁴⁸ Paraphrasing Naomi Rogers, I also recognize my own

work “as part of the process of memory working, as an additional layer to [the Convoy nurses’] stories.”⁴⁹

The nurses presented in this study do not constitute an exhaustive examination of the Convoy’s humanitarian work in China. Moreover, the stories of some of the Chinese nurses have been obliterated by time and the lack of identifiable personal records. They do, however, represent the human drama and professional vagaries encountered during three periods of the Convoy’s history: the transition from regional to global war from 1941 to 1944; the transition to civilian work in 1945 until the Friends Service Unit took over in 1947; and the FSU’s humanitarian endeavours under the new Communist regime until 1951. The voices of the China Convoy continue to resonate today.