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Exploring the Activities of Modern Missionary Skinsnes in Xinyang City: From the Perspective of Life Course

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Abstract

Casper C. Skinsnes, a prominent missionary doctor in Xinyang City, Henan Province, was instrumental in introducing standardized Western medicine to southern Henan. He founded and managed critical institutions, including the Huangchuan Lutheran Hospital and South Honan Union Hospital, while establishing nursing training programs to address local staff shortages. His trajectory was heavily influenced by the turbulent “historical time” of modern China, including warlord conflicts and the War of Resistance against Japan. However, Skinsnes exercised profound “individual agency” within these constraints, notably during the 1926 Siege of Xinyang, where he mediated a truce and protected the wounded, and during the Japanese occupation, where he sheltered refugees. This study explores the medical and humanitarian activities of Skinsnes, through the theoretical lens of the Life Course Perspective. Utilizing memoirs, missionary directories, and local chronicles, the article analyzes how Skinsnes’s transnational career was shaped by the interplay between macro-social changes and individual agency. The study posits that Skinsnes’s success relied on “linked lives”—support from his wife, the church, and local gentry. While his role was officially that of a missionary, his legacy is defined by his benevolent medical practice. By examining his life course, this research highlights how Skinsnes navigated historical upheavals to become a pioneer of modern medicine and charitable work in the Xinyang City.

Keywords: Charitable Relief Activities; Hospital Development; Medical History; Medical Missionary; Spread of Western Medicine