

Leased Territory of Unfinished Imperialism

The Space Production and Transculturation Under the Perspective of Global Modernisation of the Liu-Kung-Tao Island, China (1898-1940)

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Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand (SAHANZ) Volume 40

Conference hosted by the University of Queensland and the Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane 2-4 December 2024

Edited by Ashley Paine and Kirsty Volz

Published in Brisbane by SAHANZ, 2025

ISBN: 978-1-7638772-0-7

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DOI: 10.55939/a5418pw7va

Citation:

Lyu, Zhichen, Ruoran Wang, and Subin Xu. "Leased Territory of Unfinished Imperialism: The Space Production and Transculturation under the Perspective of Global Modernisation of the Liu-Kung-Tao Island, China (1898–1940)". In *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand: 40, Islands*, edited by Ashley Paine and Kirsty Volz, 57-58. Brisbane, Australia: SAHANZ, 2025.

Accepted for publication on 9th June, 2024



SAHANZ Society of Architectural Historians Australia & New Zealand



December 2-4 2024

Brisbane, Australia

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Liu-Kung-tao Island, located in Shandong, China, was a part of the British “leased territory” of Weihaiwei from 1898 to 1940 and was isolated from the British mainland as an endmost island in the colonial territory. Along with imperialist space production, it also carries on the process of transculturation with local Chinese and influences the modernisation process of traditional Chinese cities. Through field research and the analysis of firsthand archives from China and the UK, this paper focuses on the “enclave” at the endmost of the British Empire in the 19th century, studying the diffusion and influence of global modernisation in the space production of Liu-Kung-tao Island.

In the middle of the 19th century, traditional East Asia was impacted by the expansion of Western imperialism. Many coastal cities were opened and isolated themselves from Western settlement; a border area was demarcated as a residence, trade, and missionary area for foreigners. On Liu-Kung-tao Island, with an area of 3.15 square kilometres and a coastline of 15 kilometres, there are hundreds of original residents, mostly farming and fishing. In the late 19th century, it became a naval base of the Qing government.¹ In 1898 it became a British overseas enclave

to provide a naval port in northern China, to counterbalance the Russian occupation in Lyushun and the German occupation in Qingdao at that time, as well as to protect the commercial activities of British merchants.

The island and the traditional Chinese city faced each other across the sea, and it became an “isolated island” in China. The British Colonial Office dispatched governors, most of whom had military and administrative experience in the British mainland, the Straits Settlements, South Africa, and other colonies. The formulation of administrative regulations and urban planning (Figure 1) introduced the British administrative management, legislative system, and space production concept into the island.² However, at that time, Britain was engaged in the costly Second Boer War and failed to give more support in terms of policy and economy. It became an “isolated island” and an “unfinished imperial leased territory.” It was then treated as a British Navy resort, and local Chinese restaurant and store operators were welcome. The island became a cross-border space where military, entertainment, business, culture, religion, and other activities interweaved.³ The British Navy enhanced the island’s

1.

Bensen Liu, *Corner of the Empire: A Study of the British Rent-Occupation of Weihai (1898–1930)* (帝国的角落: 英国租占威海卫研究) (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press China, 2018), 48.

2.

Reginald F. Johnston, *Lion and Dragon in Northern China* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1910), 559.

3.

Lansheng Guo, *Travels of Yantai and Weihai (烟台威海游记)* (Tianjin: Baicheng Press, 1934), 9–12.

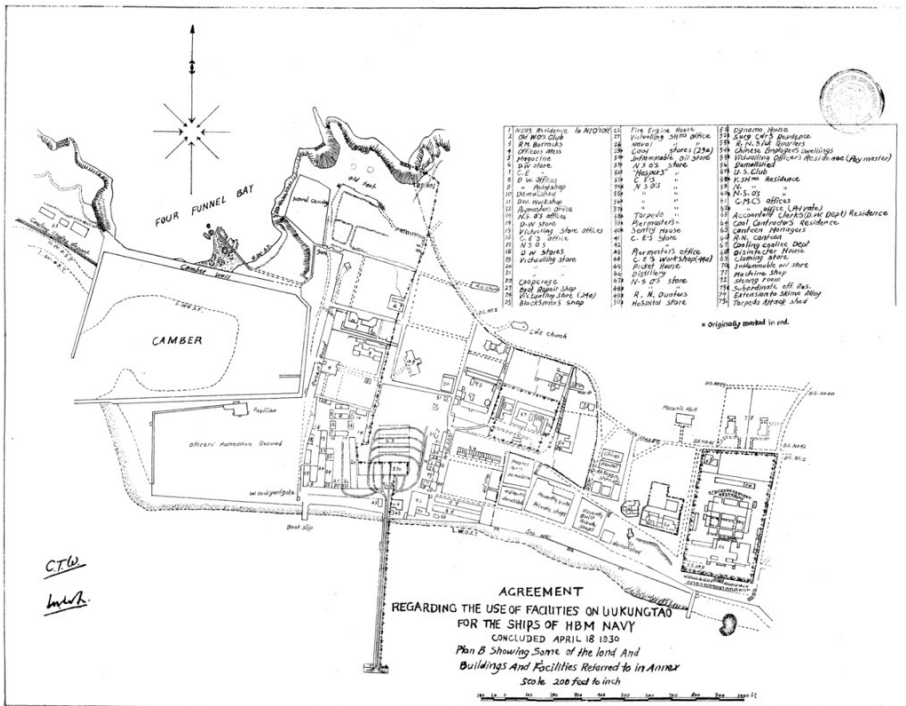


Figure 1: Map of Liu-Kung-tao Island, Shandong, China. (Image from Secretariat of Weihai Security Management Office, Weihaiwei Recovery anniversary issue [Weihai: Yantai Rende Press, 1931],78-80)

infrastructure by installing electric lighting and telecommunication systems. They also planned the construction of public sports stadiums, central hospitals, and public parks, and transformed the traditional local Liu Gong Temple into a modern naval restaurant and cinema.⁴ Additionally, they introduced the modern ideology of harbor quarantine to the island.⁵ The concepts of globalisation and modernisation were brought to the local realm, and the island underwent a cultural transformation, from conflict to integration.

Until 1930, when the Chinese government recovered the sovereignty of Weihaiwei and Liu-Kung-tao Island, the British had managed and built there for thirty-two years. In the context of Britain's global imperialist expansion during the 19th century and first half of 20th century, the space production process of Liu-Kung-tao Island reflected the transculturation between the East and the West and the complex interlinkages among imperialism, capitalism, religion, and nationalism. As an "isolated leased territory," the practices of the British governors and architects are evidence of the influence of globalisation and modernisation caused by the imperial expansion of Britain, which still has a vast

influence on the current Global South cities. The research on the influence of modernisation on spatial production and transculturation is of great significance for the systematic cognition and value assessment of architectural heritage in the leased territories today.

4. _____
Shiquan Zhu, *Weihai Problem (威海问题)* (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1931), 149.

5. _____
Secretariat of Weihai Security Management Office, *Weihaiwei Recovery anniversary issue* (Weihai: Yantai Rende Press, 1931), 78-80.