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Colonial Power and Cross-Border Politics: Rethinking of German Rule in the Kiaochow Leasehold

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At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, during the imperial world order, there were various types of colonies that had been demarcated with different types of boundaries. The Kiaochow leasehold under German rule, which will be discussed in this article, was one of these colonies. The leasehold was considered to have an “open door,” and was expected to serve as a trading colony (“*Handelskolonie*”) that would link regional economies to the world market and support the imperial economic order of free trade in East Asia on one hand. On the other hand, it was to serve as a military base to help maintain imperial order through the use of arms. Because of this, the activities of the Germans in the Kiaochow leasehold, a limited territory, had a strong influence far beyond its boundaries from the very beginning.

East Asia was a mixture of European, American, and Japanese colonies; the German colonial authorities in the leasehold executed their rule by keeping in mind the interests of not only their own nation-state or colonial empire. German colonial rule included transnational factors, which influenced German activities. An analysis of the literature on the German rule of the Kiaochow

leasehold has been limited to a binary framework — one of German–Sino relations. In this article, however, I discussed how German rule was influenced and enforced keeping in mind the East Asian transnational factors of the time, and how this caused an international conflict in the end.

First, I determine the importance of transnational factors in stabilizing colonial order, especially in urban districts. The population of Qingdao, an urban district, was distinctive because it had a higher proportion of men, constituting German soldiers stationed in the leasehold. At the beginning of the occupation, sexual violence against Chinese women in the area was rampant and venereal diseases started spreading among the German troops. This led to the German authorities institutionalizing prostitution in the leasehold. At the same time, Japanese brothel-brokers started transporting Japanese prostitutes. German rule depended on the Japanese women across the border of the territory to avoid a destabilization of the colonial social order.

Second, I analyze how the German authorities dealt with Korean political refugees who criticized the Japanese rule in Korea after the Russo–Japanese War and had escaped to the German leasehold in order to evade Japanese authorities. Despite their support of the Japanese government, German authorities could not refuse the Korean refugees entry to the leasehold since they had put up an “open door” flag. The aim of the German authorities was to put the refugees under constant surveillance in order to monitor the political activities of anti-colonialists. This was done to make the “open door” policy compatible with international control and surveillance and maintain colonial order in East Asia.

Finally, I discuss how, after the outbreak of the First World War, German rule in the Kiaochow leasehold gave Japan a pretext for invading Shandong province, including the Kiaochow leasehold, as a result of the change in international relations in East Asia. This military station of the Germans, with its “open door” policy, was a target of Japanese expansion in China, invoking international conflict and involving Shandong province in a disastrous war.