

Europeans with Chinese Servants in Tsingtau (Kiaochow) (c. 1900)

Abstract

Tsingtau was the port town of the German leasehold or “protectorate” of Kiaochow in the Chinese province of Shantung. The 99-year lease on the territory was obtained after a purportedly bloodless seizure by the Germans in response to the assassination of two German missionaries in southern Shantung in 1897. (Germany had wanted to join the western imperial powers in their Chinese land grab, and this pretense served as well as any.) The town was one of the more agreeable administrative units in Germany’s colonial possessions: it had a mild climate, a drinking-water conditioning plant, and a sewage system (facilities that no doubt facilitated the building of a brewery in 1903). As this photo illustrates, colonialists often moved to Tsingtau with their wives and families and depended on the labor of the local population in all areas of their lives. Despite various development initiatives, the area never acquired much socioeconomic or military significance. It was too remote to serve much purpose in its designated role as a refueling and transport station for German ships – as was evidenced by its quick capture by the Japanese at the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Germany’s colonies did serve a political purpose, however, insofar as they were used by the German Navy League and other nationalist lobbies to argue in favor of the construction of an ever larger German naval fleet. Germany’s colonies were all referred to as “protection zones” [*Schutzgebiete*], thus emphasizing their need for ongoing state (i.e., naval and military) protection.

Source



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