The City as the Southern Question

This innovative edited volume places global urbanism in the context of the phenomenal growth of cities of the South, investigating their colonial contentiousness and asking how their history plays out in the twenty-first-century phenomenon of urbanisation.

Inspired by Antonio Gramsci's reflections on the problem of the South, it shows that the question of southern urbanism is about the anomalies and growth of southern cities, the histories of struggles, technological and logistical reorientations, new zoning practices of neoliberal capitalism and the remaking of urban geographies towards a possible urban future that aims to be just. Crucially, it asks whether today's city is a seamless formation of several overlapping phases of growth or if there is a decisive break today, marked by the hyper growth of these cities. To understand the implications of these questions for visions of an urban future, this volume takes a number of southern cities of Asia and Europe as case studies, including Kolkata, Mumbai, Chittagong, Beirut, Athens, Naples and Marseille. It shows how these cities are paradoxically marked by both fractured geographies and new types of popular mobilisations, solidarities and an ethic of protection and care, showing this to be the core of the Southern question, constituting the urban experience of our time.

It will appeal to advanced-level students and scholars with interests in urban sociology, Southern urbanisation, postcolonial studies, political science, political economy and urban geography.

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The City as the Southern Question

Alternative Histories of Urbanisation After Gramsci

Edited by Ranabir Samaddar, Enrica Morlicchio and Sandro Mezzadra

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Several rounds of discussions on the fault lines that mark the possible futures of our cities brought out the need to return to the Southern origins of contemporary urban thinking. From that realisation to return then to the abiding significance of the reflections by Antonio Gramsci on the Southern Question was only one move away.

Many of the ideas were proposed and discussed in the writers' workshop on "City as a Southern Question" held by the Calcutta Research Group (CRG) in Kolkata jointly with the Department of Social Sciences, University of Naples Federico II, in November 2024. The workshop was possible due to the generous assistance of the Institute for Human Sciences, Vienna (IWM) and CIFAR. The editors gratefully acknowledge the support, as well as those who made the workshop successful—participants, discussants and the two organising institutions.

This volume in every sense has been a collective effort. Most of the chapters are also results of collaborations. Needless to say, the authors of the volume thank each other. The editors especially thank authors who were approached late and responded with enthusiasm. Their contributions have helped the volume to overcome some of the lacunae present in the draft plan in terms of geographical coverage and themes. However, the editors wish to make clear that the volume is not intended to be all-encompassing.

The editors also acknowledge the encouragement of Marcello Musto, the editor of the Routledge series, Critiques and Alternatives to Capitalism, to develop our initial ideas and work towards a volume. Following the trail provided by Antonio Gramsci in developing a volume on Southern urbanisation was a matter of intense discussion.

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June 2025
Enrica Morlicchio
Sandro Mezzadra
Ranabir Samaddar

15 South of the South, the Kaohsiung Port City of Taiwan

Joyce C.H. Liu

What Is the "South"?

The North–South divide is commonly perceived as a structural dynamic in which the industrialised, bourgeoisie-led nations of the global North sustain political, economic, and social dominance over the South. This dominance is not only economic but is also embedded in cultural and ideological narratives that characterise the South as stagnant, indolent, and uncivilised. However, the terms "North" and "South" are historically and discursively constructed, reflecting more than geography—they signify relative positions of power and development. Thus, we find configurations like the "South within the North" or the "North within the South" and internal colonial structures in regions traditionally classified as the Third World.

This chapter aims to problematise the "Southern question" by positioning Kaohsiung, a port city in southern Taiwan, as a microcosm of global dynamics—albeit reversed. The central argument posits that "the South" is a rhetorical device, an idealised space that operates as a Lacanian linguistic shifter. It reflects its enunciators' positionality, geographic and cultural contexts, and the desires embedded in their discourse.

The key questions are: Where does this desire originate? Why is "the South" the idealised object of longing? And what happens to "the South" once it is conquered, occupied, and incorporated by "the Center"? This chapter argues that the desire for "the South" in Japanese imperial ideology—particularly within the discourse of Southernism—is driven by a vision of world Totality, encapsulated in the concept of *tenka* in Japanese or *Tianxia* in Chinese. As an unattained realm, the South holds the potential to complete this totalising vision. However, once it is subsumed within Japanese sovereignty, hierarchical stratification inevitably takes root, reshaping the city. As a marginal space, Kaohsiung continually mutates, absorbing outsiders to replenish its labour force and sustaining its peripheral status within the imperial order.

Its development has been intricately shaped by state policies across different historical eras, continuously adapting to shifting political and economic

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landscapes within the global context. Situated at a critical juncture in the "Asian Mediterranean"—a term coined by François Gipouloux (2009)—Kaohsiung Port serves as a strategic chokepoint in the Taiwan Strait, linking the Sea of Japan, the Yellow Sea, the South China Sea, the Sulu Sea, and the Celebes Sea. This geographic position has long positioned Kaohsiung as a key node in economic corridors of maritime commerce, from the Japanese colonial period (1895–1945) to the present day.

The concept of "Southernism" is closely tied to Kaohsiung, emerging alongside Japan's Pan-Asianism and the Southern Expansion Doctrine in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Originally a small fishing village known as Takao by Indigenous peoples since the 16th century, Kaohsiung was reimagined by the Japanese as a tropical metropolis and a strategic outpost within their imperial vision. During the colonial period, it was portrayed as a "platform" overlooking the "South of the South," with Japan's gaze extending toward the Philippines and the numerous islands of the South Pacific. Under Japan's southward expansion policy, Kaohsiung was transformed into one of the region's most modern cities, serving as a logistical and military base for imperial ambitions in the Pacific theatre during World War II.

Following World War II, Kaohsiung underwent yet another transformation during the Cold War. Bolstered by substantial U.S. aid, it became a key stronghold within the "first island chain" in the Asia-Pacific, serving as a defensive barrier against communist expansion.[1] This era saw the establishment of U.S. military bases and Taiwan's first export processing zone—initiatives that spurred industrial growth and integrated Kaohsiung into global trade and production networks. These developments played a crucial role in Taiwan's rise as one of the "Four Asian Tigers." Kaohsiung continued to evolve in the neoliberal era, transitioning into a high-tech and multi-functional economic zone. By the early 2000s, it was designated as a Free Trade Economic Zone and became central to Taiwan's semiconductor industry, reinforcing its strategic importance within Taiwan's "New Southbound Policy."

Beyond the demographic diversity of Kaohsiung's labour force, the city's history reveals darker aspects of exploitation. Under Japanese colonial rule, the coolie system recruited migrant workers from neighbouring East and Southeast Asian countries until the end of World War II. During the war, Kaohsiung also hosted "comfort stations," where women from Taiwan, Korea, and China were forcibly conscripted as sexual slaves for the Japanese military.[2] These women endured severe exploitation, were subjected to frequent medical inspections, and were forced to service dozens of soldiers daily.

During the Cold War, Kaohsiung became a designated Rest and Recuperation (R&R) site for American soldiers stationed in Vietnam. This programme fuelled the growth of red-light districts in areas such as Zuoying and near the Ai River, leaving behind a legacy of Amerasian children and reshaping the city's social landscape.

Often perceived as a boundless frontier of expansion, the ocean fuels visions of infinite resources and uncharted territories. However, when state authority dominates these waters, port cities like Kaohsiung are transformed from commercial hubs into militarised outposts, serving as instruments of state ambition and industrial growth. Kaohsiung's evolution reflects this dual role, shaped by technological advancements and shifting material conditions. Each wave of migration adds new layers to the city's social structure, reinforcing racial hierarchies and spatial divisions. Over time, these stratified layers solidify, entrenching boundaries between neighbourhoods and perpetuating divisions through successive cycles of labour and settlement. In Kaohsiung, the violent processes of primitive accumulation—the systematic exploitation of labour for profit—are reenacted with striking intensity.

Building on the questions raised earlier, this chapter examines a series of interconnected inquiries: Why was the South the object of Japan's imperial desire during its expansionist period? How did this aspiration materialise in southern port cities like Kaohsiung? What was the nature of the "Southern Land" that embodied Japan's imperial imagination? What strategic roles did Kaohsiung play during the Pacific War, the Cold War, and the Age of Neoliberalism? How did these historical processes contribute to the stratification of urban space and the exploitation of its most marginalised labour force? In a corporatised and industrialised port city like Kaohsiung—where racial segregation and labour marginalisation persist—how do the most disadvantaged workers navigate coexistence with other citizens? Is there potential for cross-regional solidarity and creating a shared social space that bridges Kaohsiung's diverse communities?

The Paradoxical Trajectory of Kaohsiung Port City

The Geopolitics of the "South of the South"

Japan's Imperialist "Southernism"

To understand how Kaohsiung Port City became the coveted "Southern Land" within the Japanese colonial empire—and how it assumed a pivotal role in Japan's Southern Expansion Doctrine during the Pacific War—we must first examine the ideological foundations of this expansion or "the infrastructure of the infrastructure" described by Étienne Balibar.[3] The concepts of "Datsu-A Ron" (leaving Asia and entering Europe), an imaginary and collective subjective position assumed by Japan in the 19th century, and the emergence of the "Great Japan Expansion Theory" laid the groundwork for Japan's imperial ambitions. Assuming a new position as the centre of its universe, or *tenka*, the South holds the strategic path to fulfil the vision to dominate the world. These ideologies evolved into "Southernism" and the southward expansion policy in the 20th century, which fuelled Japan's desire to extend its influence in the Asia-Pacific region, with Kaohsiung serving as a key strategic foothold. Under the ideologies of Pan-Asianism and Expansionism, Japan not only colonised Korea (1910–1945) and Taiwan (1895–1945) but also launched its full-scale invasion of China in 1937 and initiated the Pacific War in 1941, occupying Hong Kong, the Philippines, Malaya, Indonesia, New Guinea, Guam, Saipan, and other Pacific islands (Chang 2019; Ching 2001; Chiu 2006, 2008, 2017; Hashikawa 2014; Kleeman 2003; Zhou 2014).

During the Meiji Restoration (1860–1880), Japan gradually developed an ideology of imperial expansion, giving rise to "Southernism" and, eventually, the *Southern Expansion Doctrine* as a central element of its imperial imagination and discourse. Sato Nobuhiro 佐藤信淵 (1769–1850), often regarded as the "founder of Pan-Asianism," outlined an expansionist vision in his work *A Secret Strategy for Expansion*, or *A Secret Plan for the Unification of the World* (宇内混同秘策, 1823). His plan proposed a sequential expansion: the occupation of Manchuria, the annexation of Taiwan and Ningbo, and ultimately culminating in the conquest of Europe. In Sato's writing, 宇内 (literally meaning "all under heaven") corresponds to *Tenka* in Japanese and *Tianxia* in Chinese, reflecting an early conceptualisation of Japan's global ambitions. His vision can be interpreted as an early advocacy for an Asian counterpart to the Monroe Doctrine, justifying Japan's expansionist vision under the ideology of Southernism.

The concept of *Tianxia* was not unfamiliar to Japanese intellectuals and political leaders, having been introduced to Japan as early as the mid-6th century through the transmission of Confucianism via the Korean Peninsula. Rooted in the principles of the heavenly mandate, centralised authority and legitimacy, hierarchical social order, and moral superiority, Confucian thought significantly influenced Japan's sociopolitical framework. During the Edo period, the Confucian scholar Hayashi Razan employed *Tianxia* to reinforce the hierarchical structure of Japanese society and legitimise the Tokugawa shogunate's authority. By the Meiji era, however, the concept was reinterpreted to support Japan's expansionist ambitions, positioning Japan as the centre of a new world order.

Another influential thinker in the 19th century who contributed to the Japanese expansionist vision is the Enlightenment thinker Fukuzawa Yukichi 福澤諭吉 (1835–1901) and his concept of "Datsu-A Ron" 脫亞論 (Leaving Asia and Entering Europe) (1885). Fukuzawa suggested that Japan should break away from the backwardness of Asia and integrate into Western civilisation by actively absorbing Western technology, systems, and thought, thus overcoming Japan's weak and stagnant tendencies. Deeply influenced by Darwin's theory of evolution, Fukuzawa believed that international relations were dominated by the strong and that civilised nations had the right to intervene in and manage uncivilised ones. He encouraged the Japanese to learn from and imitate Western civilisation. As a result, Japan developed an imperial colonial imagination that mimicked European empires, displaying a particular fascination with the exoticism of tropical southern lands. Fukuzawa also advocated for Japan to act without hesitation towards its neighbouring countries, using military force to secure its own interests (Chiu 2006, 2008, 2017)

In Tokutomi Sohō's (德富蘇峰) influential text "Great Japan Expansion Theory" (1894), he used Western empires' population and territorial expansion as an example, viewing the First Sino-Japanese War as Japan's best opportunity for territorial expansion. He argued that by occupying Lushun in the north and Taiwan in the south, Japan could secure the preservation of East Asia and take control of peace in the region. His ideas foreshadowed the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" through which Japan occupied and colonised much of Northeast and Southeast Asia (Liu 2004, 2011; Ching 2001; Chiu 2006, 2008, 2017) (Figures 15.1 and 15.2).

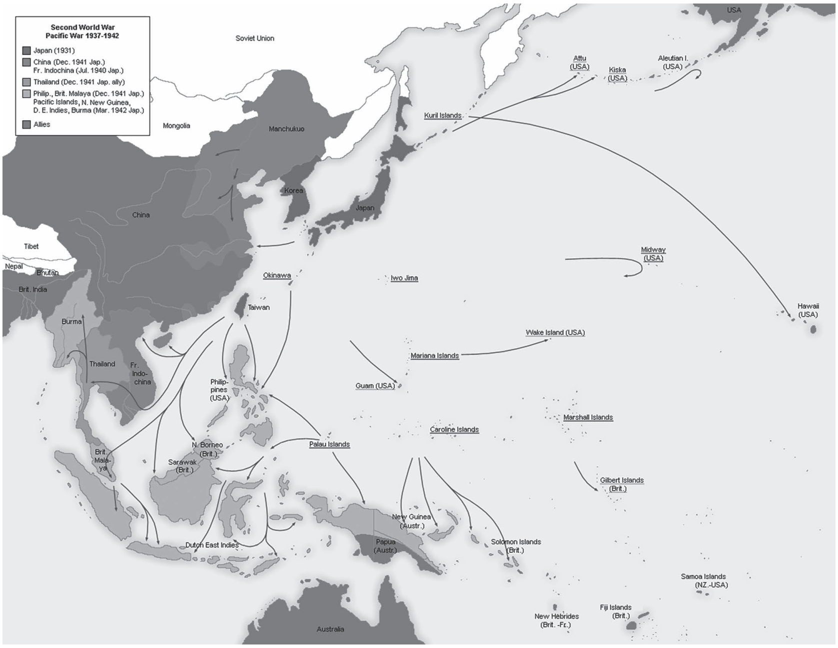
Second World War
Pacific War 1937-1942
Japan (1931)
China (Dec. 1941 Jap.)
Fr. Indochina (Jul. 1940 Jap.)
Thailand (Dec. 1941 Jap. ally)
Philip., Brit. Malaya (Dec. 1941 Jap.)
Pacific Islands, N. New Guinea,
D. E. Indies, Burma (Mar. 1942 Jap.)
Allies
Soviet Union
USA
Attu (USA)
Kiska (USA)
Aleutian I. (USA)
Kuril Islands
Mongolia
Manchukuo
Korea
Japan
China
Tibet
Nepal
Bhutan
Brit. India
Midway (USA)
Okinawa
Iwo Jima
Taiwan
Hawaii (USA)
Burma
Wake Island (USA)
Mariana Islands
Thailand
Fr. Indo-china
Philip-pines (USA)
Guam (USA)
Marshall Islands
Caroline Islands
Palau Islands
N. Borneo (Brit.)
Brit. Mala-ya
Sarawak (Brit.)
Gilbert Islands (Brit.)
New Guinea (Austr.)
Papua (Austr.)
Dutch East Indies
Solomon Islands (Brit.)
Samoa Islands (NZ.-USA)
Fiji Islands (Brit.)
New Hebrides (Brit.-Fr.)
Australia

Figure 15.1 A map of the Japanese advance from 1937 to 1942.

Source: Wikipedia.

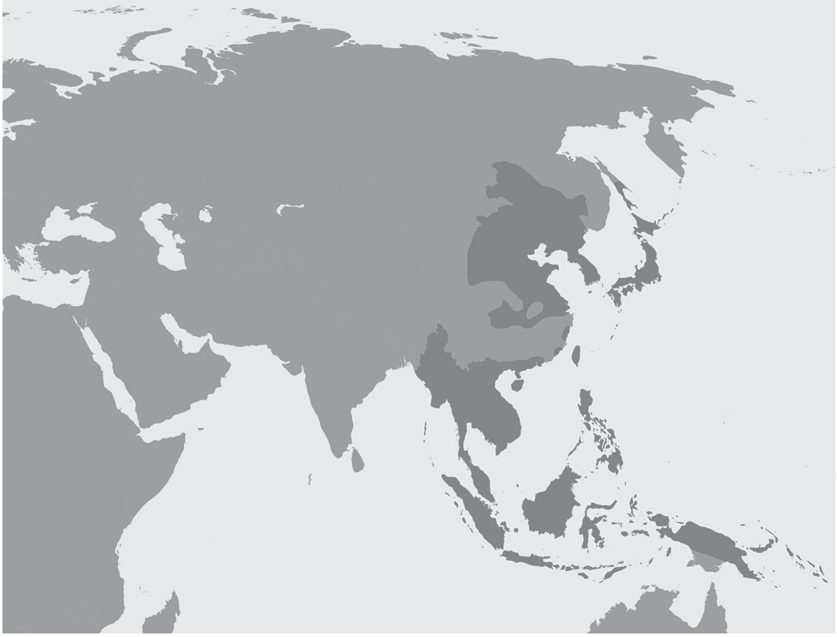

Figure 15.2 Japanese Empire—1942.

Source: Wikipedia.

The Idealised "Southern Land" in Japan's Imperial Imaginary

In the evolution of the discourse of Southernism, the evocation of an exotic and idealised image of the South emerged from the mid-19th century onwards. The idealised portrayal of the tropical South can be observed in the works of Japanese artists and travel writers of the time. Renowned Japanese Western-style painter Ishikawa Kinichirō 石川欽一郎 (1871–1945) discussed the masculine beauty exhibited by the brightness and clarity of Taiwan's natural light. To Ishikawa, Taiwan's melodies and rhythms were "masculine" and clear; the lines of its landscapes were bold, and its natural features were assertive and realistic. This "rough and hard" quality of Taiwan's natural beauty, he argued, offered a distinct and unique charm with no room for a "pessimistic view" (Yen 2001; Fogel 1996).

Japanese historian and politician Taketoshi Yusaburō 竹越與三郎 (1865–1950), in *Records of the Southern Land*, described his travels to the southern lands, including Shanghai, Guangdong, Hong Kong, Singapore, Java, Indonesia, Vietnam, Taiwan, and commented on the advantages of the "South," declaring that "our future lies in the South" and that Japan should embrace the vitality of the South. Taketoshi's "Southern Expansion Theory" emphasised the mission of transforming the undeveloped and politically backward South Seas and challenged the dominance of the North. It declared to the Western empires that overseas colonial development was no longer a privilege exclusive to the West—Japan, too, had the capacity and responsibility to expand its colonial territories. In his *Theory of Taiwan's Governance*, Taketoshi argued that Japan, rising from the Eastern seas, could share the responsibility of "the white race" and its civilising mission to colonise the uncivilised lands (Taylor 2004, 48–71; Shu 2017; Chia-Hong 2013; Liu P. 2017; Kleeman 2003; Hashikawa 2014; Zhou 2014).

At that time, Japanese and Taiwanese painters began to incorporate the rich tropical colours of the South into their works. Japanese politician and Western-style painter Miyake Kokki 三宅克己 (1874–1954) wrote in *Impressions of a Journey to Taiwan* that young Japanese painters dissatisfied with Japan's "weak gray tones or deep black landscapes" could visit southern Taiwan in search of "modern colors and tones"—vivid light, vibrant colours, deep blue skies, flaming red tiles, white walls, and green windows—"reminiscent of southern Italy or Spain." This enthusiasm for the South was frequently reflected in contemporary literary works and criticism, with literary magazines and content often featuring the "Southern Land" and "Southern Winds." The South was seen by Mitsuru Nishikawa 西川満 (1908–1999) and many others as a source of light, bringing order, joy, and splendour. This collective political unconscious of longing for the South had, by the 1940s, evolved into a conscious collective political sentiment and slogan directed towards the South of the South. The "Southern lands" concept extends beyond Taiwan to the "South of the South" as viewed from the Port of Kaohsiung. This region encompasses the territories sought by Japanese imperialism, including China, Vietnam, Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and others (Chiu 2006, 2008, 2017).

Kaohsiung, the closest port to southern China and the Philippines, was strategically important in trade and military. Kaohsiung Port was filled with palm trees and tropical flowers, giving travellers the impression of a tropical metropolis. Writers of the time described Kaohsiung as a port and a platform to gaze upon the South. From this vantage point, they envisioned a vast chessboard of countless islands brimming with exotic flowers and animals. From Kaohsiung Port (originally called Takao by the Indigenous peoples), the Yamato race could settle between coral reefs and coconut trees. Kaohsiung emerged as a critical point for Japan's Southern Expansion Policy due to its proximity to southern China and Southeast Asia.

Kaohsiung Port as a Key Strategic Base in the Pacific War

Since its forced opening in 1860 under the *Treaty of Tianjin*, Kaohsiung Port had become integrated into the international trade system. With modernisation and expansion, Kaohsiung developed active trade relationships with Japan and other nations. The Taiwan North–South Railway, starting from Keelung and ending in Kaohsiung, was completed between 1900 and 1908, coinciding with

Kaohsiung's deep-water port construction. By the late 1910s, Kaohsiung had become the most modern city in Taiwan (Shu 2017).

The primary goal of the Southern Expansion Policy was to acquire resources, particularly oil, rubber, and tin, which were essential for Japan's industrial development in the South Seas. Taiwan served as a strategic stepping stone for the Southern Expansion.

Initially, the Japanese government's policy was to develop Taiwan's agriculture to supply raw materials to Japan, while Japan focused on industrial development. However, during the second and third phases of development, Taiwan gradually shifted into a wartime economy under the Southern Expansion Policy. Alongside the booming sugar industry, Kaohsiung's shipbuilding industry also flourished. In the 1920s, the state took the lead in shipbuilding, focusing on deep-sea fishing vessels. Modern loading and unloading equipment, warehouses, shipyards, port railways, and navigational beacons were added, making Takao (Kaohsiung) a fully modernised port.

In addition to modernising the port, industrial construction also took place. Industrial zones near Kaohsiung Port housed oil refineries, aluminium plants, cement factories, and shipyards. In response to wartime development plans in 1937, all shipyards in Kaohsiung were consolidated under state control. During wartime (1936–1945), Japan concentrated all of Taiwan's industrial resources in Kaohsiung to facilitate its expansion into the South Seas and southern China. The Japanese Governor-General's Office also attracted large financial groups to invest in the military-industrial complex in Kaohsiung, managing and utilising resources, particularly in shipbuilding (Wang 2012; Lin 2019).

During the Pacific War, Kaohsiung Port became a critical assembly point for the Japanese navy and army, serving as a base for operations in Southeast Asia. Taiwan was called an "unsinkable aircraft carrier," Kaohsiung Port was a major departure point for military operations targeting the Philippines and other southern regions. Japan built multiple defence lines and fortifications in Kaohsiung.[4] Kaohsiung Port was also a crucial transportation hub for troops, fleets, and supplies. Many Taiwanese were conscripted into military service, departing from Kaohsiung to fight on the Southeast Asian frontlines. Allied forces heavily bombed Kaohsiung Port throughout the war. By the end of the war, 178 ships were sunk in the harbour, severely impairing navigation and crippling the economic and military functions of Kaohsiung Port.

U.S. Aid Export Processing Zones and Containment in the Pacific Region During the Cold War

After World War II and entering the Cold War era, the United States used its aid policies to consolidate its strategy of containing communist forces in Northeast and Southeast Asia, particularly in the First Island Chain, which included Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines, but also South Korea, Thailand, and other

Southeast Asian nations. U.S. aid to East Asia was a crucial part of its global strategy, providing not only economic assistance but also military support to counter the potential threat posed by China (Lu & Wang 2024; Hsu 2024).

American intervention also stimulated the economic takeoff and industrial development of East Asian countries. In Taiwan, for example, U.S. aid helped resolve post-war inflation, alleviate material shortages, and reduce the fiscal deficit. It also facilitated large-scale infrastructure development, including water resources, electricity, and transportation, while advancing the technological transfer necessary for agricultural and industrial upgrading. Many export processing zones were established during this period. Kaohsiung's processing zones became a prime example of how U.S. outsourcing policies used cheap labour in East Asia to reduce domestic production costs.

Kaohsiung transitioned from an import substitution strategy to an export-oriented economy with U.S. support. Establishing export processing zones marked a pivotal shift in Taiwan's industrial landscape, positioning Kaohsiung as a central hub for international trade. Taiwan's first export processing zone was established in Qianzhen District, and Kaohsiung Port became the largest port in Taiwan. As Kaohsiung's role in international trade grew, it attracted significant foreign investment. In the 1970s, Kaohsiung began developing its heavy industries, such as steel, shipbuilding, and petrochemicals. By the 1980s, Taiwan had begun developing its high-tech industries, and Kaohsiung also began to evolve into a global logistics hub, becoming one of Taiwan's largest commercial ports.[5]

Free Economic Trade Port, Heavy Industry Development, and a Platform for the "New Southbound Policy"

In 2003, Kaohsiung Port was officially designated as a Free Trade Zone, and in 2013, it was developed into a Free Economic Pilot Zone. As a Free Trade Port and Free Economic Pilot Zone, Kaohsiung Port enjoys various trade incentives, including tax exemptions on imported machinery, equipment, and raw materials and exemptions from duties, commodity taxes, and business taxes. These incentives have attracted a significant number of foreign enterprises. Additionally, companies in these zones benefit from bonded treatment for exported products, reducing production costs.

Kaohsiung's Free Trade Economic Zone has become home to various industries, including electronics, machinery, textiles, and others, forming a complete industrial chain. In 2021, it was renamed the Kaohsiung Technology Industrial Park, which includes semiconductor companies, LCD display industries, information technology, digital technology, optoelectronics industries, and research and development centres. As Kaohsiung's Free Trade Zone and Technology Industrial Park developed, coastal ports in China also rapidly advanced, surpassing Kaohsiung in container throughput and infrastructure. This has led to intense competition for Kaohsiung Port. In response, the Taiwanese government has promoted its "New Southbound Policy" to reduce reliance on the Chinese market and strengthen economic cooperation with Southeast Asian nations. Once again, Kaohsiung Port has become a vital platform for the "Southbound Policy."

The Production and Reproduction of Urban Spatial Stratification and Class Segregation in Kaohsiung Port City

Industrial Development and Spatial Segregation

The industrial development of Kaohsiung Port has firmly entrenched a spatial segregation that reflects class and racial hierarchies. Since the Japanese colonial era, Kaohsiung's urban structure has been shaped by economic projects like sugar factories, ironworks, railways, and port infrastructure. These projects laid the groundwork for segregated residential areas that continue to distinguish elite, middle, and labour classes.

During the Japanese colonial period, extensive infrastructure projects such as railways, port reclamation, and industrial zones transformed Kaohsiung into an industrial hub. These projects required a large workforce, leading to the recruitment of Japanese officials and staff who held administrative, educational, medical, and policing roles. By 1942, approximately 384,800 Japanese resided in Taiwan, including about 50,000 in Kaohsiung—nearly a quarter of the city's population at the time. Japanese residents occupied prime areas near the port, such as Hamasen and Yancheng, and were classified as first-class citizens. Taiwanese, however, were considered second-class and subjected to regular inspections, with convicts designated as the lowest tier. This graded citizenship system formalised socio-economic stratification, with Japanese citizens enjoying privileges denied to Taiwanese.[6]

The Coolie System and Its Recurrence

To meet the demands of labour-intensive industries, the Japanese colonial government relied heavily on "coolies"—foreign labourers recruited from impoverished areas and subjected to intense exploitation. The coolie system, formalised after the Treaty of Nanking in 1842, expanded across Asian port cities to supply labour for growing industries. While international anti-slavery efforts intensified with the 1833 Abolition of Slavery Act and the 1921 Slavery Convention, Japan continued to conscript coolies in its colonies until 1945. Kaohsiung's coolies were involved in forestry, sugar production, mining, and dock operations, often under harsh conditions managed by "coolie bosses" who oversaw the labour force and frequently exploited, intimidated, or even physically abused workers.[7]

In Taiwan, "Coolie Houses" became standard in every port, including Kaohsiung, creating a workforce subject to extreme exploitation and abuse. Dedicated dormitories, known as "coolie huts" or "coolie barracks," housed these workers, who were essential for operating Kaohsiung's port, railways, and sugar factories. Unlike Japanese first-class citizens or even local Taiwanese, coolies lacked any form of citizenship and were treated as mere labour commodities. The workforce largely included Indigenous people from southern Taiwan, migrants from mainland China and Southeast Asia, and impoverished labourers from Korea and Ryukyu (Tsai 2023; Daniel 2008; Cheng 2012).

Coolie dormitories were makeshift and overcrowded, isolating workers from the general population. Frequent incidents of fires, crime, and workplace hazards like gas explosions, suffocation, and machinery accidents plagued these spaces. Press coverage of over 900 workplace accidents and violent incidents revealed the severity of their conditions. For today's foreign workers, particularly in Kaohsiung's fishing industry, these conditions remain hauntingly similar, marked by exploitative practices and limited access to rights, echoing the marginalised status of coolies during the colonial period. Over time, the addition of export processing zones, international trade ports, and high-tech parks has reinforced these divisions. Spatial segregation here not only embodies class and racial distinctions but also emphasises the complex legal environments within the Free Trade Economic Zone, varying judicial authorities for different port sectors, and distinct regulations for offshore and onshore employment, depending on a vessel's location.

Today, Kaohsiung's spatial layout continues to mirror these colonial divisions. The city's elites primarily reside in Gushan and Zuoying, affluent districts near the port that attract high-income professionals and corporate managers. Middle-class residents, often in Sanmin, Xinxing, and Lingya, live closer to former Japanese residential areas with better educational and transport resources. In contrast, labourers and lower-income groups, including fishermen, are concentrated in more industrial districts like Xiaogang in the south and Nanzi in the north. Foreign fishermen are predominantly found around Qianzhen Fishing Port, often living in cramped, temporary accommodations reminiscent of the colonial-era "coolie" quarters, reflecting a persistent pattern of socio-economic exclusion (Lin 2013) (Figure 15.3).

The Disappearing Voices from the Lowest Class

Labour resistance in Kaohsiung has historically been sporadic, as those at the bottom of the social hierarchy struggle for survival without job security or legal protections. Factory workers have occasionally organised to demand better wages and working conditions, yet an undercurrent of exploitable labour—denied basic rights—persists. This class of labour has included coolies in the colonial era, Indigenous workers, foreign labourers during the Cold War, and distant-water fishermen in modern times.

During the Japanese colonial era, organised labour protests emerged despite oppressive conditions. In 1915, workers at the Taiwan Brick Company went on strike, followed by a 1921 strike by Kaohsiung Ironworks employees resisting

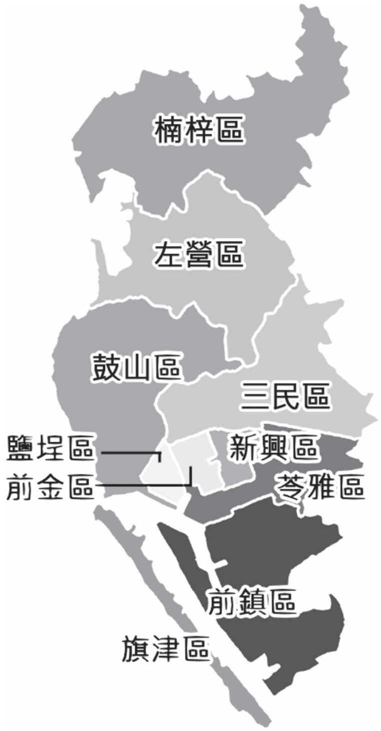

Figure 15.3 Map of Kaohsiung Port City. The orange and pink areas represent Gushan and Zuoying; Sanmin, Xinxing, and Lingya correspond to the yellow, light green, and dark green areas; Xiaogang and Qianzhen Fishing Port in the south are shown as the dark blue and light blue areas, while Nanzi in the north is depicted as the peach area.

Source: Wikipedia.

unfair dismissals. The 1927 strike at Taiwan Iron Works marked a pivotal moment, as workers from across industries, supported by leftist intellectuals, united against colonial oppression. The May Day protests that year symbolised a surge of solidarity, attracting over 1,000 participants despite police repression. However, Japan's stringent response, culminating in the 1931 Communist Party purge, stifled labour activism until after World War II (Chiang 2020; Lee 2024; Lee and Yang 2015).

During Taiwan's martial law era (1945–1987), labour movements faced even stricter suppression under laws that prohibited assembly and independent unions. Despite Taiwan's industrial expansion, strikes were illegal, and labour grievances were tightly controlled. The establishment of the Taiwan Labour Legal Assistance Association in 1984 marked a turning point, providing limited support to workers. After martial law was lifted, a renewed labour movement emerged, leading to the formation of Taiwan's Labour Party and worker-focused organisations (Ho 2016, 2023; CTS News Magazine 2021).

Yet, migrant workers continue to face exclusion. The 2005 Kaohsiung MRT protest by Thai labourers highlighted the inhumane conditions many face, including excessive overtime, inadequate housing, withheld wages, and even physical abuse. This protest revealed systemic exploitation within Taiwan's foreign labour sector, and the subsequent resignations of officials underscored the public's acknowledgement of these abuses. However, issues persist, with many migrant workers subject to overcrowded dormitories, unsafe conditions, and predatory brokerage fees that trap them in cycles of exploitation.

Organisations like the Taiwan International Workers' Association have made strides in advocating for migrant rights, establishing unions for Filipino fishermen and Indonesian caregivers in the 2010s. Nevertheless, these migrant unions face resistance from local labour groups and limited legislative backing, reflecting deep-seated racial and economic prejudices. Thus, while Taiwan's labour movement has grown, it has yet to fully embrace the rights of migrant workers, leaving them reliant on civil society organisations for representation.

In conclusion, Kaohsiung's industrial expansion has reinforced long-standing patterns of labour exploitation and spatial segregation. Although labour rights have improved, the marginalisation of foreign workers—especially in the fishing sector—mirrors the colonial "coolie" system, perpetuating cycles of exploitation. Without meaningful policy reform, Kaohsiung's social divisions will likely persist, restricting social mobility and deepening disparities across class and ethnicity.

Voices from the Margins: Three Examples from Kaohsiung

In the highly corporatised city of Kaohsiung Port, amidst tensions between local unions and migrant workers' unions, as well as the spatial segregation with characteristics of racial divisions, how can we envision solidarity and cooperation both within the city and across different regions?

Take distant-water fishing industry as an example. Taiwan's distant-water fishing industry is concentrated in Kaohsiung Port, making it a major hub for the industry, with 3,200 fishing vessels and a total tonnage of 340,000 tonnes, accounting for two-thirds of Taiwan's total fishing vessel tonnage. According to 2021 statistics, the production value of Kaohsiung's distant-water fisheries was approximately NT$28 billion, about 849,732,800 USD, representing 90% of Taiwan's distant-water fisheries' total value. Kaohsiung ranks second globally in terms of tuna production on the high seas. Vessels departing from Qianzhen Fishing Port of Kaohsiung operate across the Pacific, Atlantic, and Indian Oceans. Taiwan's distant-water fleet numbers 1,106 vessels, employing about 22,000 migrant workers (Karthikeyan & Hsiung 2024; Li et al. 2005).

These foreign fishermen are primarily employed through overseas recruitment channels, earning approximately NT$9,000 (US$273.33) per month—significantly lower than the NT$28,000 (US$850.56) monthly minimum wage for local fishermen. Since migrant workers hired through these channels are not protected by Taiwan's Labour Standards Act and are classified as workers from "extraterritorial territories," they often endure severe labour exploitation and abuse without legal oversight or penalties for employers. The European Union has repeatedly issued "yellow card" warnings, citing issues related to Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated fishing vessels.

Foreign fishermen on these vessels face abuse and various forms of forced labour, including restrictions on movement, isolation, wage withholding, debt bondage, excessive overtime, intimidation, and threats. These fishermen work on the high seas for months or even years, frequently working over 14 to 16 hours a day. Cases of fishermen committing suicide due to work and life pressures are not uncommon, and at times, they lack adequate food and water, often relying on water collected from air conditioners or rainwater for bathing. The work is dangerous, and they frequently get injured but are unable to access medical resources. Their identification documents are often confiscated. During their time at sea, they cannot communicate with family and friends or report issues to unions, the government, or civic organisations like the Stella Maris Seafarer's Center in Kaohsiung. Abuse of foreign fishermen, mysterious deaths of onboard observers, and violent conflicts between Taiwanese officers and foreign fishermen are frequent occurrences, leading to foreign fishermen being described as "sea slaves" (Hung et al. 2022)

After disembarking, these fishermen often rent shared housing near the fishing ports, such as Qianzhen Fishing Port. This area represents the bottommost layer of society, far removed from the elite neighbourhoods of Zuoying and Gushan, the middle-class areas of Sanmin, Xinxing, and Lingya, and even the lower-income areas where local labourers and fishermen reside, such as Nanzih and Xiaogang. This spatial segregation, as previously discussed, reflects not only class and racial divisions within the city but also judicial divisions. Taiwan's domestic law does not protect migrant fishermen hired through overseas recruitment, nor does it regulate the working conditions of employers in the distant-water fishing industry. Taiwanese fishermen's unions also do not advocate for the rights of foreign fishermen. Local fishermen's unions and migrant fishermen's unions, such as the first migrant fishermen's union established in Yilan, or other unions that have been slow to form in other regions, face resistance and even threats from local unions.

In such extraterritorial spaces, however, a few representative cases of cross-regional collaboration have emerged. One example is the collaborative art project between local NGOs, graduate students, and migrant fishermen. Artist Wu Ting-Kuan, who lives in Donggang, has long been concerned with the artistic practices of Indonesian migrant workers. In recent years, through fieldwork, documentation, and artistic collaboration, Wu has explored the historical realities behind migrant labourers' narratives and developed alternative storytelling

歌自遠方來
印尼移工歌謠採集與場景書寫 2021
NYANYIAN DI PERANTAUAN
Kumpulan Lirik Lagu Pekerja Migran Indonesia & Laporan Skena Musik di Taiwan 2021
Trans/Voices Project
Trans/Voices Project（TVP）

Figure 15.4 Songs from Afar: Indonesian Migrant Workers' Song Collection and Scene Writing.

Source: Wu Ting-Kuan 2021.

modes beyond the mainstream. Together with his team, he has published two volumes of original songs created by Indonesian fishermen: *Songs from Afar: Indonesian Migrant Workers' Song Collection and Scene Writing 2021*, and *Songs from Afar: Indonesian Migrant Workers' Song Collection and Scene Writing 2024*. These two books document the musical practices of Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan since the 1990s, reflecting the social context and historical changes behind the songs and performances. The first volume includes 64 songs, and the second volume features 100, with bilingual editions in Indonesian and Chinese. The books are also available for free download online and distributed to cultural spaces throughout Taiwan. Through these songs, Taiwanese people can learn about the lives and emotions of Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan over the past three decades, including themes of love, homesickness, marginalisation, cramped living quarters, loneliness, anxiety, war, death, and commentary on Indonesia.

Another example is the recent movement—"Wi-Fi Now" initiative, launched in 2023 by Indonesian Ph.D. student Jonathan Parhusip from the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies at National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University, in collaboration with the Stella Maris Seafarer's Center in Kaohsiung and the Indonesian Seafarer's Association (FOSPI). The Stella Maris Center has long supported distant-water fishermen, ensuring basic human rights, offering legal advice and psychological counselling, and assisting fishermen in resolving various work-related issues. FOSPI, an association of 12 Indonesian fishermen's communities from Kaohsiung and Donggang, joined the initiative after multiple discussions, garnering over 1,000 signatures from distant-water fishermen. The campaign focuses on securing the right of fishermen to access Wi-Fi on fishing vessels, advocating for government legislation that would require all distant-water vessels to provide Wi-Fi services. This would reduce feelings of isolation during work at sea, enabling communication with family, unions, and human rights organisations, improving mental health, and allowing real-time reporting of labour exploitation or abuse. This initiative has garnered the support of over 20 NGOs in Taiwan, including the Taiwan Association for Human Rights, Taoyuan City Masses Service Association, Humanity Research Consultancy, Global Labour Justice, and others, as well as international labour rights organisations from the U.S., Japan, and Europe (Cf. Parhusip 2023) (Figure 15.5).

The third example is a fictional performance art piece by contemporary Taiwanese artist Chen Chieh-Jen, held at the Kaohsiung Port docks in 2006, in response to global dockworkers' protests against port privatisation. The event centred on the Neptune Jade, a container ship that was blockaded at ports around the world by striking dockworkers and unable to unload its cargo. In the 1980s, under Margaret Thatcher's government, all ports in the UK were privatised, with private companies employing non-union temporary workers to replace unionised dockworkers. In 1995, the Mersey Dock and Harbour Company unexpectedly fired dockworkers, prompting 400 workers to form a picket line and go on strike. The action in Liverpool ignited a worldwide dockworkers' movement against port privatisation. The Neptune Jade, which was loaded by non-striking workers at the Liverpool port in 1997, faced picket lines organised by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union at ports in Oakland, Vancouver, Yokohama, Kobe, and others, preventing it from unloading its cargo. The ship finally sailed to Kaohsiung, where it and its cargo were auctioned off, ending its mission. Similarly, in 1997, the Kaohsiung Dockworkers' Union protested against the privatisation of port handling operations, but the protest failed to prevent privatisation, forcing them to accept casualisation of labour. Chen Chieh-Jen's 2006 performance art imagined a fictional dockworkers' strike, recording the scene in video as a distant response to the Neptune Jade, which had once docked at

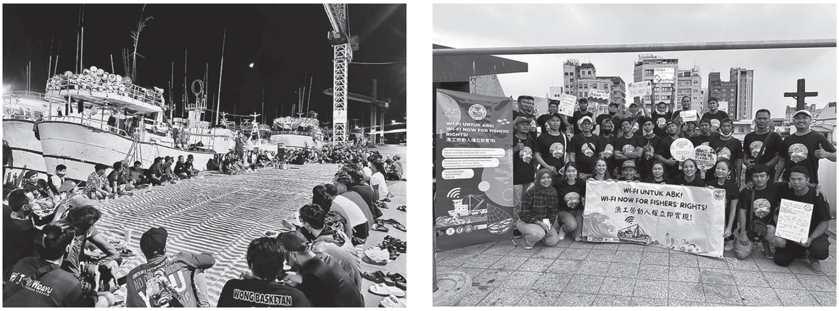
WONG BASKETAN
WI-FI UNTUK ABK!
WI-FI NOW FOR FISHERS' RIGHTS!
漁工勞動人權立即實現!

Figure 15.5 Jonathan Parhusip, the Stella Maris Seafarer's Center in Kaohsiung, and the Indonesian Seafarers' Association (FOSPU) collaborated on the Wi-Fi Now campaign from 2023 to 2024.

Source: Jonathan Parhusip.

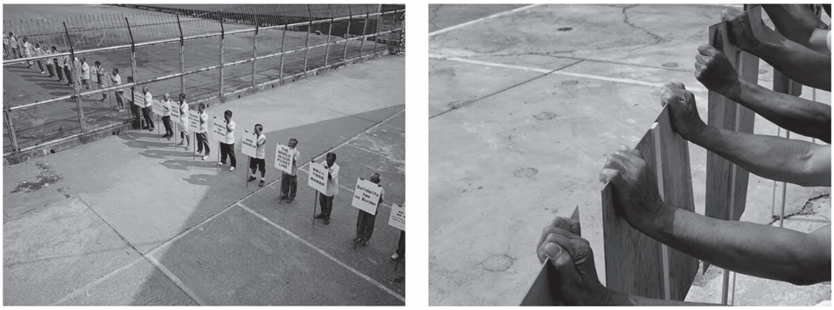
THE WORLD IS OUR PICKET LINE
Solidarity has no Border

Figure 15.6 Chen Chieh-Jen's 2006 performance art imagined a fictional dockworkers' strike at Kaohsiung Port.

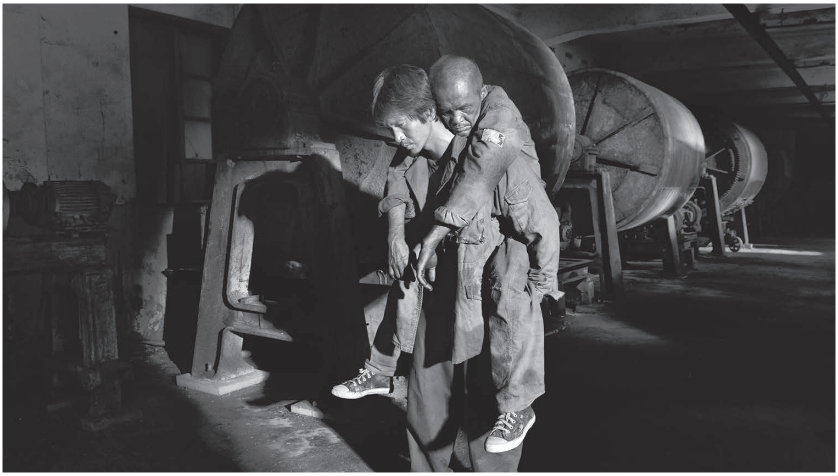

Figure 15.7 Chen Chieh-Jen's Empire's Borders-II: Western Enterprises, Ind. (2010). Anonymous workers during the post-war industrialisation period through the U.S. Aid.

Kaohsiung Port, and commemorated the failed resistance against privatisation, as well as the solidarity of international dockworkers. Chen's 2006 Kaohsiung Port artwork literally linked up all his artistic installation and video works on low-class labourers in the past two decades (Figure 15.6).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have traced a historical cartography of class differentiation and spatial segregation, shaped and reshaped over time by state policies and urban planning. The "Southern Question," as exemplified by Kaohsiung Port City in southern Taiwan, reveals the shifting dynamics of imperial desire and geopolitical ambition—from the idealised vision of a Southern utopia to the material realities of Japanese expansionism, driven by the overarching framework of *Tenka* or *Tianxia*. As a key nexus in the southern region, Kaohsiung Port City has functioned both as a coveted frontier and as a space that sustains a marginalised labour force composed largely of non-citizen workers. The evolving conditions of coexistence between citizens and non-citizens—particularly coolies—have left lasting imprints on the city's urban landscape, reinforcing the hierarchical structures embedded within its spatial and social fabric.

The spatially racialised class segregation—sustained by labour policies, legal frameworks, citizenship ideologies, and architectural designs—manifests historically in heterogeneous yet structurally analogous forms. Every moment of urbanisation has included recognised citizens, marginalised "second-class" citizens, and, beyond citizenship, non-citizens such as coolies, temporary labourers, and slaves. The dynamics of production and reproduction have persisted since the Japanese colonial era, which recruited coolies, through the post-World War II reconstruction aided by the U.S., to the economic boom of the 1970s and 1980s that necessitated a large influx of Indigenous labourers from across the island, and into the neoliberal demands for foreign guest labourers from Southeast Asia since the 1990s. This trajectory culminated in the booming distant-water fishing industry of the 2000s, which employed labourers through an extraterritorial recruitment system for Indonesian and Philippine fishers.

Solidarity within urban spaces does not occur naturally. When conditions are complacently accepted and legitimised as necessary and unproblematic, opportunities for change are stifled. Democratising borders can only happen when cross-border intersections and translations are initiated from within and beyond those borders. This intersection arises when individuals are willing to step beyond their comfort zones and take the initiative to connect with those "othered." The examples presented in this chapter—the translation of lyrics by Indonesian fishers, the Wi-Fi Now campaign, and the artistic actions of Taiwanese artist Chen Chieh-Jen—are voices emerging from the margins whose expressions resonate not only as individual sentiments but also as a collective voice shared by all who are ready to transcend borders. Although these instances may be rare, they create a common space sustained by their shared resonance.

Notes

1 Caroline Norma, "The Operation and Impact of the American Military's 'R&R' Programme in Japan During the Korean War," *Asian Studies Review* 44, no. 3 (2020): 365–81.

2 Yu-ha Park, *Comfort Women of the Empire: Colonial Rule and Politics of Memory* (Taipei: Yu Shan Publishing, 2017).

3 Étienne Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, trans. Christine Jones, James Swenson, and Chris Turner (London and New York: Verso, 2002).

4 Including underwater listening stations and torpedo fortresses, to prevent Allied landings and attacks on the port.

5 In the 1990s, economic exchanges between Taiwan and mainland China increased, and Kaohsiung Port saw rising trade volumes with several Chinese ports, including Tianjin, Qingdao, Shenzhen, Ningbo, and Lianyungang.

6 Kuo-Yu Chiang, *General Strike Across the Island: The History of Labor Movements in Colonial Taiwan*, 1st ed. (Taipei City: Avant-Garde Publishing, 2020).

7 Shui-Ping Cheng, "The Internal Structure of 'Coolie' Labor in Colonial Taiwan During the Japanese Rule: Focusing on Emerging Port Cities Such as Kaohsiung," *Taiwan National Policy Journal* 6 (2012): 28–63.