

26th July 2009
Hong Kong

Dear Weihsieners,

I have now completed my research trip to the mainland and am spending some time in Hongkong. Before going into details, I would like to thank everyone on this list who has helped me out, but especially Ms Mary T Previte, who was particularly helpful in putting me in touch with people like Mr Jeff Liu and Mr Sui Shude in Yantai and Weifang who were tremendous hosts for my time in Shandong.

The first book I read on Weihsien was Gilkey's *Shantung Compound*, and it was very much on my mind as I started out from Beijing, taking a short taxi ride from my hotel to Beijing's main train station, riding in air-conditioned comfort through slow-moving traffic. I had splurged a little, buying hard-sleeper train tickets to Yantai, and enjoyed the train trip through fairly rural country with a clean berth to recline in and vendors wandering up and down the corridor selling peanuts, fruit, drinks and other snacks.



I rolled into Yantai quite early in the morning, and asked the driver to drive along a road that hugged the beach, taking in the shoreline and all of the recent development that has remade the face of the city. My first visit was in 2002, and even in the short span of seven years much has changed. The small cluster of Western buildings on the beach that had seemed rather ignored during my first visit have in many cases been pushed into the shadows of constructions products that are almost monstrous in scale. Others seem to be slowly transforming into up-scale restaurants, bars, or art galleries. But on the whole, the old Yantaishan (Consular Hill) area is fairly well-preserved, and of course the Chefoo School buildings remain safely tucked away behind the protective walls of a PLA navy base. In contrast, though, the Temple Hill houses seemed to be in much sorrier shape. Now used as multi-family residences, windows sag from their frames and the yards are unkempt, leaving a strong air of neglect.



After two days in Yantai, I booked a ticket by intercity bus and soon found myself on the road and headed for Weihsien. What a trip! The landscape was just beautiful—green mountains with flecks of white rock poking through, neatly-tended fields and clusters of houses and villages. Some of my friends in Yantai had led me to believe Weifang to be not worth visiting, almost a nasty smudge of a city on the way

to nicer places. But as our bus made its way along the highway and entered the city, I found myself in what was almost a garden. Staying in a rather budget hotel, I was pleasantly surprised to find a nearby river which had been attractively landscaped along both banks with footpaths, benches and trees gently arching overhead.

The next day, I was met by Mr Sui and two other assistants from Weifang's Foreign Affairs Bureau and we set out for the camp. We initially stopped near a bridge a short distance from the camp where I was able to take a photo of what has become *Ledao Guangchang* 樂道廣場 (Plaza of the Happy Way?). I thought it particularly appropriate that, situated behind the camp, is Weifang's People's Hospital and what was once known as #2 Middle School, now Guangwen Middle School 廣文中學, thus continuing the old compound's tradition of medical care and education.



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From what I saw, all of the old camp buildings were in active use in one way or another. Some of the old dormitory units are used to house the twenty or thirty gardeners and groundskeepers who are now employed at the site. Mr Sui related to me how he had intervened to save these particular buildings, arriving one day to find workers busily removing the roof tiles in preparation for demolition!

Wandering around the elegant memorial site, I couldn't help but feel amazed at how wonderful a job the Weifang City Government had done in making a monument to the camp in a way that was fully accessible to visitors. While I was wandering around the monument, I overheard a small group of high-schoolers, perhaps three or four of them, discussing the history of the site, before snapping a group photo by the water's edge.



The Shadyside Hospital Building, with the Eric Lidell Memorial in front of it, initially appeared to be unused, but on a trip back the next day, I noticed that a basement door was open (I didn't have the nerve to go in). Some children were kicking a ball back and forth near the front steps, while a middle-aged man was taking advantage of the building's shade to escape the heat and do some reading. When wandering around the back of the building, I saw some potted plants and a fluorescent light on in a main floor window, and noticed that a large air-conditioning unit had been bolted to the side of the building. I can't imagine it being used as an office—perhaps one or two rooms inside are being used as a residence?



Overall, I thought that the Shadyside building was in fairly good shape. Peering in through the front entrance way, there really wasn't all that much to see, but there were no obvious signs of water damage or anything else. It was interesting to see that the cornerstone with the inscription, 'Shadyside Hospital, 1924,' had been defaced, with the English version only somewhat readable and the Chinese side almost completely obliterated.

The school buildings and the museum, which I visited the next day, were in good shape, probably very much as they were during the 2005 celebrations, and I found the material in the museum to be very helpful. Other buildings which I saw later seemed to have been taken over by the local branch of the Chinese Communist Party, which seemed quite ecumenical given the history of the buildings as Japanese-run internment camp and Presbyterian mission compound.

I interrupted a game of hoops to snap this shot—on closer inspection, I saw the sign above the main entrance said that it was an active centre for old party members '老干部活动中心,' but on this particular day, I didn't see anything going on inside the building. On the opposite side of the basketball court, there was another building which definitely showed more signs of life, with the front door open and a small crowd of older women chatting and drinking tea off to the side. These buildings were quite close to the People's Hospital buildings, and I noticed a number of people clad in various bandages wandering about. One elderly man gave me a massive grin before pointing in the direction of the Shadyside Hospital building, thinking I hadn't found it yet.





The black and white signboard on the front column reads: 中共奎文區廣文街道，廣文街社區支部委員會, which I think is simply the ‘Guangwen Community C.C.P. Branch Committee,’ while the red banner is just some sloganeering about residential fire-prevention.

Comparing the Weihsien site to other similar places in China, or even just the places I mentioned above in Yantai, I really get a sense of how carefully the internment site has been preserved, with buildings either set aside and protected, used for educational purposes related to the camp, or integrated into normal community life.

Overall, it really was a great trip, both really useful for my thesis and also quite enjoyable. Being able to finally see all of these sites after reading about them in various books, diaries and other records really brought the history of the place to life for me. For that, I owe a great debt of thanks, both to people in Shandong like Jeff Liu and Sui Shude, but also to all of the former internees who have been so helpful in pointing the way.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Henshaw
jonathan.henshaw@ualberta.ca