‘Rent-in-Perpetuity’ System and Xiamen Title Deed:
A Study of Sino-Anglo Land Transactions in China's Treaty Ports

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CHAIRMAN
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Abstract
Through an examination of deeds used in Sino-Anglo land transactions on Gulangyu (鼓浪屿, Kulangsu), this paper demonstrates the role of Huaqi (华契, a particular Chinese-language deed) in legalizing a foreigner’s land rights and safeguarding Chinese lessors' interests. Huaqi ensured the consistent influence of local tradition and indigenous customs on foreigners' land development. Huaqi’s ambiguity and intricacy in demarcating the property arose with the increasing mobility of residents. The registration of title deeds allowed the Consulate to efficiently manage their nationals’ properties. The changing formats and formalization of a title deed indicated the institutionalization process of the “rent-in-perpetuity” system in Xiamen. The seminar concludes that complex local contexts led to diverse ways of managing and supervising Sino-foreign land transactions in China’s treaty ports, mixing traditional Chinese ideology alongside western practices.

About the Speaker

CHEN Yu (Ph.D.), Architect and Urban Historian, Assistant Professor in the National University of Singapore. Her research interests center around history of treaty ports in China, overseas Chinese architecture, and regeneration in Asia. Her publications include “The Making of a Bund in China: The British Concession in Xiamen (1852-1930)”.

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