

**The Ford of Heaven Upon Troubled Waters**  
**A History of Tianjin as a River City in the Twentieth Century**

MA, Rui

Intake Year: 2015

Research Track: History and Theory of Architecture and Urbanism

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**Dissertation Abstract**

During the 20th century, many cities in China underwent a dramatic acceleration in their urban development and the transformation of their natural environments. This process was deeply influenced by the Modern Movement and the will of building a modern country. As an important site in the history of China's modernization, the city of Tianjin offers an outstanding example of how a city's urban form changed in relation to its aquatic environment. My study will trace the history of Tianjin's physical form in relation to its natural environment over the course of the 20th century, with particular attention paid to the following moments in time: 1897 -1927, 1928-1948, 1949-1978, and 1979 to 2000.

This research seeks to establish linkages between the history of urban planning in Tianjin and its water conservancy. By exploring how the river and the city have participated in the ideological construction of the Chinese nation and its cultural identity, I intend to illuminate how notions of the "modern" were introduced into China, and how the definition of the modern changed over time. My research will also investigate the sociopolitical institutions and cultural conflicts at work in this history and their effects on the modernization of Tianjin and China at large.



Terrain of Tientsin along the Hai-Ho River around 1902". Source: La Chine a terre et en ballon.  
Planche 30-1

**Keyword:** urbanization, water environment, modernization, Tianjin, the 20th century