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# CITY OF THE RIVER: THE HAI RIVER AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF TIANJIN, 1897-1948



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Abstract

This dissertation explores the modern transformation of the Hai River by the Haiho Conservancy Commission from 1897 when the Commission emerged to 1948 when the Commission became loosely controlled by the Guomindang. Thematically, this research documents the changes to the Hai River and its tributaries and the construction of the city of Tianjin and its waterfront in the modern era. It pays equal attention to the cultural aspects involved, as the river, city, and its people interacted in ways that constructed multiple meanings and new values. The undertaking argues that transforming the Hai River into a navigable river for modern transportation and communication played a critical and dynamic role in building a modern vibrant city. The discussion begins with the vision that the governors in the Qing Dynasty had for constructing an agrarian state with an emphasis on a water conservancy-irrigation project near the city. It examines the State's involvement in enhancing the cultural meanings of the river through allowing folk religious practices on the waterfront. It then delineates the major shift from the Qing management of water and the river to the series of physical transformations of the Hai River launched by foreign engineers in the Haiho Conservancy Commission and their Imperialist determination to make the city into a modern harbor for commercial businesses. During the lengthy process of change of the natural surroundings, Chinese conservancy commissions also participated in forming and shaping water management policies. The Chinese strengthened its state power by conservancy commission and thus delivered greater influence and incorporated the Hai River tributaries into its own planned economic construction of a state. The river and the city were further transformed by the Japanese. A gigantic Japanese colonialist scheme focused on constructing a comprehensive transportation system in North China, resulting in further changes to both the river and its city.

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