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Doctoral Dissertation

Doctoral Program in Architectural and Landscape Heritage (38<sup>th</sup> Cycle)

**Building a Port City in China:  
The German Multiscale Planning Approach in Qingdao at the Turn  
of the 20th Century and Its Urban Heritage**

**Abstract**

Qingdao, as a major port city in north-eastern China, traces its earliest construction activities back to the late Qing Dynasty (circa 1890), when initial military defence facilities were established. However, its systematic urban development and construction were primarily advanced under the comprehensive initiatives of the German Empire from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. Benefiting from its advantageous geographical location and abundant mineral resources, Qingdao was designated by Germany as a key military base in the Far East and gradually evolved into a port city that integrated both military strategic and economic functions. Under Germany's systematic planning and construction, Qingdao's urban layout, architectural character, and spatial organisation were meticulously designed, earning it the reputation of being "Germany's model colony" at the time and making it one of the most representative colonial cities in modern China.

German colonial rule over Qingdao was not merely an act of military expansion or economic exploitation but rather the implementation of a multiscale and systematic colonial policy framework. To legitimise its rule, the German authorities began constructing cultural and institutional foundations at an early stage, including the establishment of missionary bases, the exportation of educational systems, and interventions in urban management. Through cultural influence and the establishment of a hierarchical order within the military system, they laid the groundwork for their broader strategic configuration. Before urban construction, a series of legal and regulatory measures, such as segregation policies between Chinese and Europeans, land management systems, building codes, and sanitation principles, provided a stable institutional framework for urban planning. Moreover, the German government extensively drew upon its homeland's late nineteenth-century urban development experiences and adapted these principles to Qingdao's local context throughout the planning process. Western urban concepts and planning methods at the time, such as the "garden city" ideal, functional zoning, the

integration of military and administrative spaces, and public infrastructure establishment, were introduced and localised, resulting in a distinctly characteristic model of colonial urban planning.

Specifically, Germany established a coherent urban structure in Qingdao through thorough planning that divided the city into distinct functional zones, including port facilities, railway transport, municipal administration, commercial services, and residential areas. The construction of the Qingdao Port and the Jiaozhou-Jinan railway promoted regional connectivity and economic growth; the landscape greening system enhanced the quality of the urban living environment. Meanwhile, the spatial logic of colonial governance was evident in the segregation-based planning and management model. European District adopted a free-form layout adapted to the natural terrain and incorporated diverse contemporary Western urban planning concepts and architectural styles, resulting in a unique urban landscape. In contrast, the Chinese District was designed according to a more rigid grid pattern and developed the “Liyuan” housing type, which embodied traditional Chinese modes of living. This contrast reflected the intricate interplay between planning control and cultural adaptation within the colonial urban framework. It was precisely through such practices, from regional policy to urban layout planning, infrastructure development, and even architectural design, that the Germans carried out their work, an approach we can today define as “multi-scalar.” This dissertation likewise adopts this multiscale perspective to study their planning and construction.

Besides, the urban spaces and architectural styles established during this period have been well preserved after the dismissal of the German government and across the political and cultural changes, forming a distinctive historical and cultural heritage. These historical legacies have come to define Qingdao’s distinctive contemporary urban character, serving not only as spatial carriers that reinforce urban identity and historical memory, but also in enhancing the economy through cultural tourism.

This study employs urban and architectural history research methodologies, including multiscale spatial analysis, multi-source archival research, comparative analysis, and digital tools. By examining a wide range of primary archival materials from German and Chinese archives, such as historical documents, maps, architectural drawings, memoirs, correspondence, policy texts, and local gazetteers, this research uncovers the German planning intentions, spatial logic, and the whole process of urban practices during the colonial period in Qingdao. These findings provide theoretical insights and historical references for understanding the mechanisms of colonial spatial production, postcolonial heritage governance, and the broader historical trajectory of modern urban planning in China.

## **Key Words**

German–Chinese Colonial City;

Military Port City;

Multiscale Town Planning;

Historical Urban and Architectural Spaces

Post-colonial Urban Heritage