

Between Solidarity and Economic Constraints

Rethinking the Cold War



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Between Solidarity and Economic Constraints



Global Entanglements of Socialist Architecture
and Planning in the Cold War Period

Edited by
Christoph Bernhardt, Andreas Butter
and Monika Motylińska

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Christoph Bernhardt, Monika Motylińska

Global Entanglements of Socialist Architecture and Planning in the Cold War Period – Approaches and Perspectives

Global entanglements in the fields of architecture, planning and building have played a rather minor role in the historiography of globalisation, if compared to the flows of natural resources, manufactured goods, technologies, labour, migration, or the transfer of institutions.¹ However, within the more general and long-term process of globalisation circulations of architecture and planning became relevant in at least three ways. Firstly, colonial planning and building generated a large number of facilities worldwide, like harbours, roads, forts, settlements and other infrastructures of colonial power which played a decisive role in the maintenance of imperial regimes.² Secondly, multilayered global circulations of planning concepts interconnected societies and cities across and far beyond colonial contexts. As a result, an extensive legacy of urban layouts, military engineering as well as public, religious and private buildings are preserved worldwide, which until nowadays, refer to each other and document material and cultural ties across the globe.³ Thirdly, many ‘transfer agents’ like architects, engineers and planning institutions who designed and directed the construction of buildings created multipolar professional networks and personal relations, triggering economic exploitation and cultural exchange.⁴

Following a long-term perspective also helps to reflect the specific historical place of global entanglements in the field of architecture and planning between the

1 See Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton. A Global History* (New York, NY: Knopf, 2015); Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (München: C.H. Beck, 2009).

2 Robert Home, *Of Planting and Planning. The Making of British Colonial Cities* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2013); Matthew Gandy, *The Fabric of Space. Water, Modernity and the Urban Imagination* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2014).

3 ICOMOS ed., *Moderne neu denken. Architektur und Städtebau des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Karl Krämer Verlag, 2019); Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink and Sylvère Mbondobari, eds., *Villes coloniales/métropoles postcoloniales. Représentations littéraires, images médiatiques et regards croisés* (Tübingen: narr Verlag 2015); Horst Gründer and Peter Johanek, eds., *Kolonialstädte – europäische Enklaven oder Schmelztiegel der Kulturen?* (Münster: LIT-Verlag 2001).

4 Aymone Nicolas, *L'apogée des concours internationaux d'architecture: l'action de l'UIA, 1948–1975* (Paris: Picard, 2007); Martin Kohlrausch, *Brokers of Modernity. East Central Europe and the Rise of Modernist Architects, 1910–1950* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2019).

Socialist Bloc and the “Global South” in the post-World War Two period. In this edited volume, we connect this perspective to a conceptual approach that puts the study of global flows of capital, labour, know-how, visions and ideas, as well as institutions and materialities, centre stage.⁵ Each of these flows could follow, as historical analyses have shown, a different intrinsic logic and undergo periods of rise, stagnation and fall. Consequently, the notion of a linear trend of a long-term growing transnational cooperation or one-dimensional ideas of ubiquitous antagonist confrontation during the Cold War become obsolete. In nineteenth-century Europe, for example, the transnational flows of capital strongly increased in the context of industrialisation, driven by investment in railways and other transport infrastructures and fuelled by the rise of modern imperialism. On the other hand, expertise in building and planning in the first decades of the nineteenth century became increasingly “nationalised” in many newly founded Technical Universities so that early modern patterns of the transnational migration of experts gradually expired.⁶ At the same time, departments for building and planning or public works within state administrations were expanded and powerful corps of engineers constructed large national infrastructural networks. Some decades later, rapid urbanisation paved the way for the emergence of urban design as a new academic discipline and triggered the transnational circulation of ideas and cooperation, culminating between 1900 and World War One.

Globalisation of building and planning in the twentieth century

Until 1910 intensive transnational communication on architecture and planning and solid professional networks had been established. Leading professional journals like the British “Journal of the Royal Institute of Architects”, the French “L’Architecture” or the “Deutsche Bauzeitung” in Germany continuously presented key projects of planning and building in the five continents – if still with a strong Western bias – to experts in a growing number of building authorities and universities. Early multilateral associations such as the “International Federation for Housing

⁵ Anthony D. King, *Writing the Global City* (London: Routledge, 2016).

⁶ Christoph Bernhardt, “Europäische Wasserbau-Ingenieure im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert. Wanderungen und Wissenszirkulation,” in *Migration und Baukultur. Transformation des Bauens durch individuelle und kollektive Einwanderung*, edited by Heiderose Kilper, 259–270 (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2019).

and Town Planning” (IFHTP),⁷ large international conferences like the RIBA conference in London 1910 and planning competitions like “Wettbewerb Groß-Berlin” 1908 to 1910 served as platforms for the exchange of ideas.⁸ At the same time, powerful construction companies like Balfour Beatty Pic (GB), Société générale d’entreprises (F), Philipp Holzmann AG or Grün & Bilfinger (G) and others sent numerous engineers to many parts of the world, where they, together with local subcontractors and workers constructed bridges, railways and roads.⁹

Within this multipolar process, two modes of professional exchange and communication were given special attention by scholarly research until recently: On the one hand, rapidly growing “Atlantic crossings” (D. Rodgers) of concepts and experts indicated strong mutual interest and increasing cooperation between European and US-American experts and authorities.¹⁰ As a result, key innovations like the Chicago Plan of 1908/10 and the Greater Berlin competition of 1908/10 were intensively discussed on both sides of the Atlantic.¹¹ On the other hand leading US-American and European experts, and private enterprises transferred technologies and concepts to the East and the South. Siemens delivered projects for underground railways to Moscow, Edo (Tokyo) and Buenos Aires,¹² and German Engineering company G. Polysius supplied machinery and cement plants to clients in Egypt, Belgian Congo and Iran, for instance. The French Compagnie des Eaux de Constantinople constructed modern Western sanitary infrastructure in Istanbul,¹³

7 Philipp Wagner, *Stadtplanung für die Welt? Internationales Expertenwissen 1900–1960* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016).

8 Christoph Bernhardt and Harald Bodenschatz, eds., “Der Wettbewerb Groß-Berlin 1910 im internationalen Kontext.” *Informationen zur modernen Stadtgeschichte* 41 (2010): special issue no. 1.

9 Bernhard Stier and Martin Krauß, *Drei Wurzeln – ein Unternehmen. 125 Jahre Bilfinger Berger AG* (Ubstadt-Weiher: ifu – Institut für Unternehmensgeschichte, 2005); Monika Motylińska and her research group are currently investigating the role of construction companies in the ongoing research project “Conquering (with) Concrete. German Construction Companies as Global Players in Local Contexts” (Freigeist Fellowship fund, edited by Volkswagen Stiftung, 2020–2024).

10 Shane Ewen and Pierre-Yves Saunier, *Another Global City. Historical Explorations into the Transnational Municipal Moment 1850–2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008); Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

11 Carl Smith, *The Plan of Chicago: Daniel Burnham and the Remaking of the American City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

12 Dietmar Neutatz, *Die Moskauer Metro. Von den ersten Plänen bis zur Großbaustelle des Stalinismus (1897–1935)* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2001); Dennis Kirchberg, *Analyse der internationalen Unternehmensstätigkeit des Hauses Siemens in Ostasien vor dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Diss. Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, 2010, d-nb.info/1056018593/34 (accessed 20 October 2021).

13 Noyan Dinckal, *Istanbul und das Wasser. Zur Geschichte der Wasserversorgung und Abwasserentsorgung von der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis 1966* (München: Oldenbourg, 2004).

and colonial authorities imposed urban planning in Delhi/India, Tanganyika (now Tanzania) and elsewhere.¹⁴ For a long time, these forms of cooperation were mainly perceived as a one-way transfer of knowledge and benefits from North to South within the framework of imperial exploitation. They were also condensed into narratives and genealogies of Western architectural styles and pioneering figures (predominantly those of “white men”, more reciprocal concerning East Asia). But this cliché of a one-way-transfer from North to South which dominated teaching, research and popular media and made invisible the active role of local actors and governments as well as the expertise of planners from the “Global South,”¹⁵ has been increasingly replaced by the notion of a global “circulation and appropriation” of ideas, as Hard/Misa put it.¹⁶ The knowledge of the manifold interferences and transnational diffusion of concepts of planning and building, which went far beyond the US-American and European exchange, has been strongly developed in the last years.

In the aftermath of the revolutions in Russia (1917), Germany and Austria (both 1918), the emergence of socialism as a state order in a growing number of national states in the Eastern hemisphere fueled concepts of socialist planning and building, which had previously been marginalised, and new modes of transnational professional communication. Between 1920 and 1935, a new transnational order of antagonist cooperation in planning and architecture was established, in which contradicting trends of transfer, appropriation and conflict arose. When in the late 1920s, the Soviet regime launched campaigns of rapid and brutal industrialisation as a key strategy in its first five-years-plan, some of the largest US-American capitalist companies, like Ford, were hired to build factories and company towns in the USSR.¹⁷ At the same time, West-European left-wing modern architects and planners like former Frankfurt councillor for building, Ernst

14 Jane Ridley and Edwin Lutyens, “New Delhi, and the Architecture of Imperialism.” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth history* 26, no. 2 (1998): 67–83; Jochen Monstadt and Sophie Schramm, “Toward the Networked City? Translating Technological Ideals and Planning Models in Water and Sanitation Systems in Dar es Salaam.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 41, no. 1 (2017): 104–125.

15 Greg Grandin, *Fordlandia. The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford's Forgotten Jungle City* (London and New York, NY: Picador, 2009); Smitri Pant, “Capital Planning and State Formation: Examples Outside Europe,” in *Moderne neu denken. Architektur und Städtebau des 20. Jahrhunderts*, edited by ICOMOS, 59–67 (Stuttgart: Karl Krämer Verlag, 2019).

16 Mikael Hard and Thomas J. Misa, “Modernizing European Cities: Technological Uniformity and Cultural Distinction”, in *Urban Machinery. Inside Modern European Cities*, edited by Mikael Hard and Thomas J. Misa, 1–22 (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2008).

17 Harald Bodenschatz, and Christiane Post, eds., *Städtebau im Schatten Stalins. Die internationale Suche nach der sozialistischen Stadt in der Sowjetunion* (Berlin: Verlagshaus Braun, 2003).

May, were invited to create blueprints for large-scale urbanisation of the USSR.¹⁸ Against this background, the well-established scholarly narrative of a decline and collapse of transnational cooperation in “the age of extremes” (Hobsbawm)¹⁹ has to be modified and specified for the field of architecture and planning. On the one hand, in the early 1930s, the USSR became a hub and hotspot of international professional debate. It was only in 1935 when the Stalinist turn in architectural doctrine towards socialist realism provoked a fundamental clash between the socialist and the modern Western approach to architecture and planning which would last until 1955. On the other hand, it has been largely overlooked that German National socialism or fascist Italy did not strictly follow a strategy of national autarchy and isolation but developed a kind of imperialistic internationalism, in which spatial planning and transnational policies prepared and accompanied the deadly political and military concepts of occupation, exploitation, and genocide.²⁰

Transnational relations in planning and architecture in the Cold War period: A “blind spot” of research?

In 2012, one of the leading experts in the field, Łukasz Stanek, considered the history of the transfer of architecture and planning between the socialist countries and the “Global South” a “major blind-spot of current architectural historiography of the post-war period”.²¹ In a special issue of the *Journal of Architecture*, he addressed five key questions to pursue: the modes of multiple cooperation, the role of organisations and collective actors, the “export beyond modernism”, architecture as self-representation of political systems, and the important role of “socialist-inspired modernisation processes” in the history of the “Global South”.²² Since

18 Claudia Quiring, ed., *Ernst May, 1886–1970. Neue Städte auf drei Kontinenten* (München: Prestel, 2011).

19 Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994).

20 Isabel Heinemann, and Patrick Wagner, eds., *Wissenschaft – Planung – Vertreibung. Neuordnungskonzepte und Umsiedlungspolitik im 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2006); Phillip Wagner, “Between National Socialism and Expert Internationalism: Karl Strölin and Transnationalism in Urban Planning, 1938–45.” *European Review of History: Revue européenne d’histoire* 25, nos. 3/4 (2018): 512–534.

21 Łukasz Stanek, “Introduction: the ‘Second World’s’ Architecture and Planning in the ‘Third World.’” *The Journal of Architecture* 17 (2012) no. 3: 299–307, 299.

22 Stanek, “Introduction,” 299.

then, the state of research has considerably progressed, not least as a result of Stanek's own work. In his seminal book on "Architecture in Global Socialism", published in 2020, Stanek investigated the triangular cooperation between the Socialist Bloc, the Middle East and the (anglophone) West Africa, delivering fundamental insights into this world of collaboration, encounters and experiences.²³ His study makes clear that the built environment in cities like Accra, Lagos or Baghdad was strongly shaped by actors from the Eastern Bloc – and that ideological and economic differences were negotiated in particular, seemingly remote locations. Stanek also demonstrates how the experiences abroad impacted particular actors and their later projects in Eastern Europe.

However, his contribution is by far not a singular occurrence, but rather part of a larger shift in scholarly attention towards the "Second World" and its global entanglements. Jonathan Bach and Michał Murawski have recently proposed considering different case studies of the urban planning from the "Global East" not only in their historical development – which follows a longer trajectory of research on the history of the built environment in Eastern Europe after World War Two – but also to look at their appropriation and transmutations in a variety of spatial, both urban and more peripheral contexts.²⁴ A considerable number of other architectural and urban historians participated in the debate which seeks to overcome binary narratives of antagonist competition between the "First" and the "Second World" and their role in the so-called "Third World".²⁵

Within the realm of social and cultural anthropology, the material and social dimensions of the built socialism have gained momentum in the work of Christina Schwenkel.²⁶ The author has managed to bridge the gap between the (often rather abstract) planning imaginaries proposed by the architects from the GDR, for instance, and the labourers who actually built the settlements in Vietnam. Moreover, she has investigated memories of the socialist planning in the context of the current functioning of the towns like Vinh, countering the all-too-easy perception of ruination and decay of the socialist heritage.

23 Łukasz Stanek: *Architecture in Global Socialism. Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020).

24 Jonathan Bach, and Michał Murawski, *Re-Centring the City Global Mutations of Socialist Modernity* (London: UCL Press, 2020).

25 E.g. Andreas Butter, "Showcase and Window to the World: East German Architecture abroad 1949–1990." *Planning Perspectives* 33, no. 2 (2018): 249–269. For the agenda of the actors from the "Global South" see Duanfang Lu, ed., *Third World Modernism* (London: Routledge, 2011).

26 Especially in her most recent monograph, Christina Schwenkel, *Building Socialism: The Afterlife of East German Architecture in Urban Vietnam* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).

In the field of economic history Oscar Sanchez-Sibony and Max Trecker analysed the economic frameworks as well as decision-making processes on the ground, for instance in joint-venture projects of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) in Syria or India.²⁷ These multi-scalar studies followed up on the institutional histories, such as the monograph about Comecon by Ralf Ahrens.²⁸ Both Sanchez-Sibony and Trecker investigated the agency of various stakeholders. As Trecker observes, “the cooperation between East and South during the Cold War was underpinned by ideological as well as pragmatic political considerations”.²⁹ The attention to those pragmatical considerations is something that resonates with the contributions gathered in this volume.

The role of the actors from the Socialist Bloc has also recently been investigated by historians of development aid who took an interest in their complex entanglements in different settings in the “Global South”.³⁰ The strategies and activities of the GDR in various campaigns of solidarity were reconstructed in a volume on “Comrades of Color”, which was edited by Quinn Slobodian.³¹ The contributors offered a nuanced analysis of clashes between the official political discourse of socialist solidarity and actual encounters among students and planners from Cuba, Vietnam, the GDR and Mozambique. Within the history of diplomacy, for instance, similar striving for a more differentiated approach towards the historiography of the Cold War has been visible – with a sensitivity towards the variety of specific vantage points and local contexts instead of larger narratives of a bipolar confrontation.³²

27 Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, *Red Globalization: The Political Economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev*. *New Studies in European History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Max Trecker, *Red Money for the Global South: East-South Economic Relations in the Cold War*, *Routledge Studies in Modern History* (London: Routledge, 2020).

28 Ralf Ahrens, *Gegenseitige Wirtschaftshilfe? Die DDR im RGW – Strukturen und handelspolitische Strategien 1963–1976*, *Schriften des Hannah-Arendt-Instituts für Totalitarismusforschung*, vol. 15 (Köln: Böhlau, 2000).

29 Ahrens, *Gegenseitige Wirtschaftshilfe?*, 228.

30 E.g. Marc E. Frey, Sönke Kunkel, and Nancy H. Kwak, “Introduction. Transforming Cities: Urbanization and International Development in Africa and Latin America since 1945.” *Comparativ* 30, nos. 1/2 (2020): 10–19; specifically for Germany: Young-sun Hong, *Cold War Germany, the Third World, and the Global Humanitarian Regime*, *Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

31 Quinn Slobodian, ed., *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World*, *Protest, Culture and Society*, vol. 14 (New York, NY and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015).

32 E.g. Simo Mikkonen, Jari Parkkinen, and Giles Scott-Smith, eds., *Entangled East and West: Rethinking the Cold War Cultural Diplomacy and Artistic Interaction during the Cold War*, *Rethinking the Cold War*, vol. 4 (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019).

All of these research strands converge into a handful of interdisciplinary anthologies, like the series “Rethinking the Cold War”. In this regard, the notion of “alternative globalisations” as proposed by James Mark, Artemy M. Kalinovsky and Steffi Marung resonates with our understanding of circulations of architecture, and urban planning under global conditions – neither as a streamlined process of the spread of Western ideas of ‘modernity’ and ‘progress’, nor as a straightforward opposition to it, but rather as a larger cluster ‘globalising projects’.³³ As this short overview shows, in the last decade substantial contributions have been made to complicate the history of the Cold War period, thus drawing closer to fulfilling Stanek’s plea for investigations of modes of multiple cooperation, the role of collective actors, or “socialist-inspired modernisation processes” in the history of the “Global South”.

Key aspects and guiding questions

Recent critical research on twentieth-century globalisation, development and modernity largely agrees that traditional categories of centre and periphery, of a linear modernity, and of simple bipolar relations between a dominating “North” and a subaltern “South” in contexts of colonialism or globalisation are not productive anymore, as they obscure the complex dynamics of processes which developed under global conditions. Thus, they have been replaced by inquiries on the “coproduction of modernity”,³⁴ “multipolar historical relationships” and “variations of colonialism”.³⁵

Building on these calls for more diversified approaches and in line with multidisciplinary investigations of alternative globalisations as discussed above, we are interested in revealing the nuanced global entanglements during the Cold War era, especially with regard to interactions between the actors from the “Second” and “Third World” – and also within the respective blocs. However, rather than proposing one definition of “socialist architecture and planning”, we use this term as a broad indicator, denoting activities in countries that were

³³ James Mark, Artemy M. Kalinovsky, and Steffi Marung, eds., *Alternative Globalizations: Eastern Europe and the Postcolonial World* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press 2020).

³⁴ Thomas Schwinn, “Globalisation and Regional Variety: Problems of Theorisation,” in *World Culture Re-Contextualised. Meaning Constellations and Path Dependencies in Comparative and International Research* edited by Jürgen Schriewer, 119–138 (London: Routledge 2016).

³⁵ “Empires of Knowledge: Expertise and Imperial Power across the Long Twentieth Century,” conference at University of British Columbia, Vancouver/Canada, 15–16 September 2017, conveners: Axel Jansen (GHI), John Krige (Georgia Institute of Technology) and Jessica Wang (UBC).

either identifying themselves as socialist or in which socialist-leaning tendencies occurred throughout the time, as was the case in Ghana. In order to conduct multifaceted analyses of circulations of socialist planning and architecture, it is our aim to further interrogate personal experiences of actors involved but also to observe how diverse constraints denoted the challenges with which architects, urbanists, clients or users were confronted through planning, construction and appropriation of the built environment. Moreover, this focus resonates with reflections of architectural historians looking at the links between architecture and economy.³⁶ However, so far very little attention has been paid to non-capitalist economies and their impact on the built environment.

The notion of economic constraints is a helpful lens through which to analyse multi-scalar processes of global circulations of the Cold War period in architecture and planning, as it enables us to observe ways in which room for manoeuvre was frequently restricted.³⁷ However, we define constraints broadly, taking into account a variety of factors limiting the scope of activities in the domain of the built environment. Thus, we want to address the perceived or actual scarcity of (economic) means, for instance lack of construction materials, capital, (skilled) labour or know-how, but also to restraints of legal frameworks or bureaucratic practice, limiting the possibility of travel for the actors from the “second” and “third world”. These constraints strongly shaped the outcome of architectural and urban projects that were often either not realized at all or strongly modified. In the long term, potential for conflict arose from the often bureaucratic, centralised nature of project management plus travel/contact restrictions, which led to a delayed perception of feasibility deficits (e.g. due to inefficient transport routes) and technological incompatibility with foreign partners – such as different voltages for electrical appliances. Moreover, the target countries had their own ideas of modernity, which could differ from those of the foreign experts – and those models were born out of the encouraging spirit of helping people to help themselves.

Yet it would be too simple to draw a general causal link between the socialist economies and scarcity. Instead, we prefer a notion of economic constraints

³⁶ E.g. Aggregate Group, ed., *Governing by Design: Architecture, Economy, and Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012); Jo Odgers, Mhairi McVicar, and Stephen Kite, eds., *Economy and Architecture* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2015); Peggy Deamer, ed., *Architecture and Capitalism: 1845 to the Present* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2014).

³⁷ The concept of economic constraints has permeated developmentalists discourses from the Cold War period (e.g. Charles Elliott, *Constraints on the Economic Development of Zambia* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971]) – in this regard, this an attempt to overcome the limitations of this vantage point.

which builds on the perceptions and experiences of contemporary witnesses – or is depicted by the protagonists in the sources.³⁸ This also applies to the concept of solidarity, not specifically defined here, but rather observed as another recurring theme for the actors from the Socialist Bloc, especially in their encounters with their counterparts from the “Third World”.³⁹ Repeatedly we at least see tensions between those two poles – of solidarity and economic constraints – and conflicts between (supposedly) noble ambitions and challenging circumstances on the ground.

However, even if attempts to overcome those constraints did not prove satisfactory in many cases, Max Trecker’s observation holds true that “the state socialist countries of the East may not have been able to provide the other side with the latest technology of the world but the technology they could provide was sufficient for the purposes it had to serve”.⁴⁰

In order to pursue such an analysis, we are also interested in various scales related to the built environment. Starting with the micro-perspectives of biographically-oriented investigations, we intend to contribute to a better understanding of personal motivations in the field of construction, including gender aspects. This means, for instance, paying attention to professional and private challenges that female architects such as the German planner Hannah Schreckebach in Ghana were confronted with during their international careers. On an individual level, the Cold War might not have been perceived by the protagonists as the dominant context of their acting – and yet the sheer fact of being associated with the Western or Eastern Bloc often had a direct or indirect impact on their room for manoeuvre.⁴¹

As transnational activities of architects and planners – especially those from Eastern Europe due to politically imposed limitations to individual mobility – took place mostly in institutionalised contexts, we pay particular attention to the role of collective actors such as construction companies and state Design Institutes. Moreover, we take a closer look at platforms of exchange such as trade fairs and professional media. All these institutions which were not something

³⁸ Cf. Monika Motylińska and Phuong Phan, “‘Not the usual way?’ On the Involvement of an East German Couple with the Planning of the Ethiopian Capital.” *Architecture Beyond Europe (ABE)* 8, no. 19 (2019). journals.openedition.org/abe/6997 (accessed 2 July 2021).

³⁹ Slobodian, ed., *Comrades of Color*.

⁴⁰ Trecker, *Red Money for the Global South*, 228.

⁴¹ Jadwiga E. Pieper Mooney, and Fabio Lanza, eds., *De-Centering Cold War History: Local and Global Change* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2013); Eric Burton, Anne Dietrich, Immanuel R. Harisch, and Marcia C. Schenck, eds., *Navigating Socialist Encounters: Moorings and (Dis)Entanglements between Africa and East Germany during the Cold War* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021).

particular for the Cold War period but part of a longer trajectory across the twentieth century, played a crucial role in negotiating, brokering and bartering building projects.⁴² International fairs in Zagreb and elsewhere and strategies of specialised enterprises from socialist states, which are analysed in this volume, provided contemporary architects and planners with alternative spaces of interaction in times when more direct collaborations across political, ideological or economic divisions were more difficult to realise than after the political turn of 1989 to 1991 and the collapse of the Eastern Bloc.

On the organisational macro-level, we address questions on the role of multi-lateral institutions and global networks and flows. One of the specific socialist institutions of paramount transnational importance was the already mentioned Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon). In 1959, the Permanent Commission for Building of the Comecon was created; its conferences were regularly held in different member states, such as the 37th conference in the Czechoslovakian capital of Prague.⁴³ Main themes discussed during meetings of the Permanent Commission were strategies of standardisation and methods of prefabrication, with a focus on industrial architecture and mass housing. Yet, apart from producing a large body of (grey) literature, this administration does not seem to have had a strong direct impact on the realities of international construction processes. Far more relevant in this regard was the system of barter, which means the mutual exchange of goods and services as an alternative to financial credits. This system was widely used among members of Comecon and sometimes in joint projects with states in the Middle East or Africa.⁴⁴ Shaped by particular interests, strategies and actors' constellations, it also materialised through architecture and infrastructure.

We are combining attempts to contribute to the more nuanced history of the Cold War era with the particular attention to narratives of dealing with constraints, not only in political terms but also related to economic and material aspects of construction processes. We address the need for complex global histories of the built environment post-1945. In doing so, we are aware of the imbalances between different vantage points, as those centring the actors from the Eastern Bloc feature more prominently in this volume. However, instead of exclusively focusing on competitions between the "East" and the "West", or tensions within the Soviet Bloc, or tracing links between the "Second" and "Third" world, we

42 For the role of construction companies: Marc Linder, *Projecting Capitalism: A History of the Internationalization of the Construction Industry*, Contributions in Economics and Economic History, vol. 158 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994).

43 Ministerium für Bauwesen der DDR, ed., *Zusammenarbeit der Mitgliedsländer des RGW auf dem Gebiet des Bauwesens* (Berlin 1975: Bauakademie der DDR), 5.

44 Stanek, *Architecture in Global Socialism*.

prefer to move beyond those preset geographies, focusing instead on different *modi operandi* of diverse actors and construction of the built environment under the conditions of global socialism. For us, the Cold War is, first of all, a temporal framework delimiting the scope of the investigations, even if some of the studies from the volume also deal with its aftermath until the present. In this regard, we are venturing rather far from Westad's political history of the Cold War "as a confrontation between capitalism and socialism",⁴⁵ looking for cases of collaboration across the divides or tensions within the socialist bloc, for instance. At the same time, this is an attempt at "writing about the politics of architecture" – and urban planning – without reducing the architectural and the urban to politics, to paraphrase Sibel Bozdoğan's question.⁴⁶

These observations on the multilayered and multiscalar circulations of architecture and planning during the Cold War lead to five sets of guiding questions for our volume. The first set of questions addresses the actors and institutions on the micro, meso and macro-scale. Who set the rules, and which persons, professions and roles were present in the complex histories of construction projects? Far beyond architects and planners, we have to include a variety of political institutions such as ministries, foreign trade institutions, and different economic actors, for instance, Publicly Owned Enterprises, labourers or even singular personalities that acted as brokers in the processes of exchange into our perspective. Second, to better understand the circulation of knowledge, practices and material, the geographies and temporalities of these mutual exchanges, we are focusing on essential arenas and particular spatial settings, such as trade fairs as hubs for construction industries, but also in a more narrow sense on their role in the circulation of design solutions which has been largely overlooked.⁴⁷ Third, we inquire into how the architectural projects were shaped by the actual context of the Cold War, antagonist ideologies and economic interests. To what extent could political (and personal) solidarity be reconciled with economic interests, both strong and often conflicting motives of the "export" of built socialism? Fourth, we are analysing conflicts and supposed "failures" of projects and their far-reaching consequences, sometimes also on the diplomatic level, far away from the construction site. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we are interested in different patterns of appropriation of the built environment, and consider how users adapted the buildings once they

⁴⁵ Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War. A World History* (London: Allen Lane, 2017), 1.

⁴⁶ Sibel Bozdoğan, "Architectural History in Professional Education: Reflections on Postcolonial Challenges to the Modern Survey." *Journal of Architectural Education* 52, no. 4 (1999): 207–221.

⁴⁷ Apart from rare exemptions such as the study by Anoma Pieris ("Modernity and Revolution: The Architecture of Ceylon's Twentieth-Century Exhibitions," in *Third World Modernism*, edited by Duanfang Lu, 141–164 [London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2010]).

had been erected and inhabited, and what labels and meanings were associated with them, in political discourses and daily practices.

This book is derived from the contributions to an international workshop and an international conference which were held in the Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space in Erkner (near Berlin) in July 2017 and June 2018. The editors organised these events in the context of the research project “Architectural projects of the GDR abroad. Buildings, actors, and cultural transfers”, which was financed by the Gerda Henkel foundation from 2016 to 2018.⁴⁸ Delayed by the Covid pandemic and related problems, authors updated and revised their contributions in spring 2022.⁴⁹ A related publication from the same research project which is edited by Andreas Butter and Thomas Flierl offers additional insights on architectural projects of the GDR abroad.⁵⁰

Contributions

The book's first part reflects the basic model of socialist international planning and building. From its beginnings, it was characterised by transferring Soviet concepts to foreign partners in a bilateral, mostly hierarchical cooperation. At the same time, in any of these bilateral projects, the adaptation of Soviet blueprints and recipes was fundamentally shaped by the USSR's partners, as Susanne Stein reveals along the process of the “self-Sovietisation” of China in the 1950s. Despite its status as a developing country, China was undoubtedly the most important socialist nation-state outside the USSR. In the long run, it developed its imperial strategy (culminating, as we know, in the early twenty-first century). Framed by large Soviet loans and military support, the education of planners and the diffusion of manuals and reference books were, as Stein shows, critical strategies shaping professional cultures and standards of building in China. This was especially true for Chinese economic and urban planning along Soviet guidelines,

⁴⁸ Out of this project, articles and an interactive website were published. See the references in the footnotes to this introduction and the website: ddr-planungsgeschichte.de/auslandsprojekte/ (accessed 15 January 2022).

⁴⁹ We are very thankful for the kind and extremely helpful cooperation with series editor Kerstin Bönker and Verena Deutsch and for the comments of the unknown reviewers which helped to improve the manuscript.

⁵⁰ Andreas Butter, and Thomas Flierl, eds., *Der Architektexport der DDR: Von Sansibar bis Halensee* (Berlin, Lukas Verlag 2022). Besides a number of essays, the volume presents a catalogue of 110 buildings and ensembles as well as a facsimile of the “Tropenbaubriefe” publication by the Weimar University from the 1980s.

directed by many planners, engineers and other experts from the USSR. But, as Stein underlines, the Chinese adaptation of Soviet concepts was very selective and guided by intrinsic interests and modes of appropriation.

The pathway of the socialist state of Mongolia has a similar significance, especially concerning its role as one of the few non-European member states of Comecon, which the country joined in 1962. Nikolaj Erofeev and Łukasz Stanek discuss the dominant role of Soviet and Comecon capital for economic development and urbanisation and the fusion of bilateral and multilateral cooperation of experts within this organisation. They reconstruct in detail how, following a mechanism of “imperatives”, the Mongolian capital city of Ulan Bator was developed with the help of Soviet and Comecon concepts, loans and close institutional cooperation with key domestic organisations, like the Mongolian state Design Institute. As in many others cases, a strong logic of permanent negotiation and conflict fundamentally shaped this fraternal socialist cooperation.

The basic mission and origin of the Soviet model of imperial development was the execution of Moscow’s rule in the Soviet republics, as Petrova and van der Straeten demonstrate in the prominent case of Uzbekistan. Even in areas representing the inner periphery of the USSR, the regime’s fundamental philosophy of imposing a socialist model of modernisation with mass housing as its key strategy could only be partially realised. Besides the ubiquitous tensions between Moscow’s central authorities and planners on the one hand and their local partners on the other, the lack of resources for Soviet prefabricated mass housing gave place to local initiatives for individual private homes, which corresponded to the local housing traditions. Mismatches between the Chruschtshev housing program, local climate and family patterns triggered a critical debate on the deficits and a potential co-evolution of modern and vernacular architecture.

The book’s second part widens the perspective beyond the USSR, its member states and its closest neighbour China to the GDR and the “Global South”, exploring the multipolar and tangential character of socialist globalisation in architecture and planning. This part reflects the fact that since the 1960s, parallel to the USSR, other socialist countries increasingly developed global engagement strategies and inner-socialist cooperation. As a result, the role of the Soviet Union changed from being a headquarters to a key critical player amongst others in an increasingly multilateral setting. Along with a nickel plant planned for Cuba from 1975 onwards, Monika Motylińska reveals the complex interaction between various stakeholders, from state authorities through large enterprises to local administrations and individual planners, which repeatedly changed their roles over time. By addressing the shift of GDR’s architectural “export” from inner-European to global networks in the early 1970s, Motylińska demarcates this period as a significant turning point in the long-term development of socialist architectural

circulations that this book reconstructs. The Comecon and its different sub-units were strongly dominated by the USSR and other European countries and helped to coordinate many partners, which represented eight national states in the case of the Cuban nickel plant.

From a “Global South” perspective of African countries which had achieved independence in the early 1960s, agreements with Comecon countries seemed to promise economic development plus public welfare. They often pursued concepts of Pan-Africanism and Non-alignment, as Anne-Kristin Hartmetz shows in her chapter on Ghana’s agro-industrial cooperation with Comecon. Hartmetz demonstrates that Ghana’s option for state socialism as an institutional model did not prevent close collaboration with Israel or Western public and private organisations. This multifaceted cooperation called for several strategic decisions, like intense public supervision, control and coordination of foreign trade and economic exchange. Industrialising agricultural production strongly stimulated collaboration with countries like Czechoslovakia or Poland to construct sugar plants and other industrial factories. Still, it proved very complicated to realise and to do so for all partners.

A large number of adventurous experts often carried out such joint transnational projects. Amongst these, female planners and architects have been largely overlooked, as Rachel Lee demonstrates highlighting the case of the West German planner Hannah Schreckenbach in socialist Ghana. Schreckenbach’s career reflected typical patterns of multicultural education and mobility in the post-World War Two period when she studied both in parts of Germany and London. Having become an expert in tropical architecture, she moved to Africa and achieved top positions in the Ghanaian public works department and tropical architecture; she then moved to Africa and earned top posts in the Ghanaian public works department and higher education. Schreckenbach was part of a particular multinational network of engineers and architects in Ghana, together with other foreign experts and Ghanaian specialists. Some of them had been trained in the US and Great Britain. By documenting and promoting indigenous mud architecture, Schreckenbach raised awareness of special traditional building techniques that most modern architects at the time overlooked or even despised.

Most building projects in transnational socialist cooperation were certainly realised in Europe. Franziska Klemstein shows the work of Polish experts for urban reconstruction and historic preservation in the Northern German city of Stralsund and the various layers of cooperation in this field. Here, Polish specialists counted among the leading international experts, since they had realised the reconstruction of the heavily destroyed cities in Poland after World War Two. The Stralsund case reflects in detail the substantial challenges that the attempt of socialist planning ideology to transform a sizeable pre-socialist building stock to

the demands of a “socialist urban society” was confronted with. As a result, the East-German public “Peoples own enterprises” (VEB) often followed a kind of Potemkin strategy of modernising apartments behind historical facades. For the mission to mix renovation and new construction of buildings, the Polish Enterprise of PKZ Szczecin offered a multidisciplinary team of experts with unique experience which was active in many parts of the world, from Paris to Egypt and beyond.

The third part of the book reflects the patterns and channels of perception and communication in which the visions and concepts of socialist architecture were publicly presented. Here a multitude of media and modes of perception becomes apparent. International Fairs, like those of the 1950s and 1960s in Zagreb, functioned as hubs for exchanging new ideas on “modern” architecture and planning. At the same time, they resented the Yugoslavian state as an intermediary and “translator” between East and West, as Jasna Galjer’s chapter shows.

Cooperation between socialist architects and planners from different countries could build on close political and institutional relations within the Comecon block and on common visions for prefabricated housing and friendship associations. This was clearly the case in the cooperation between the GDR and China, which Andreas Butter examines in his chapter. Here, economic cooperation was framed by ideas of political solidarity in which the export of factories and specific technologies, like thin concrete shells, were part of the more general idea to stabilise the socialist world as part of the Cold War confrontation. Projects like “factory 718” in Beijing were constructed with the help of an extensive network of GDR specialists and functioned as an experimental field for prefabrication in industrial construction. They were highly valued by officials because of their functional features but also conformed to Chinese ideas of beauty. Some of these factories are still producing today; others became architectural icons in the course of postmodern urban transformation.

Socialist transnational solidarity policies were based on interstate cooperation but also relied on the work of semi-public mass organisations, associations and campaigns, as Paul Sprute shows in the case of the East-German solidarity committee (“Solidaritätskomitee”). By collecting donations and organising work camps in the “Global South”, the committee created strong support for local projects and personal ties between the persons involved. Losing its official status after the collapse of the GDR, the committee continued its activities as a private association in several parts of the world so that the socialist political legacy was transformed into a post-socialist NGO.

The transformation of East-German architecture that had been constructed in the Vietnamese city of Vinh in the post-World War Two period is reflected on by Christina Schwenkel as a case of “travelling architecture” and its re-interpretation

in everyday life. She shows that from the beginning, the housing projects proposed by the Germans were negotiated in a kind of “co-production” with Vietnamese representatives and were rooted in different cultures of space, especially regarding the design of apartments. Moreover, many tenants remodelled their living space to maintain domestic traditions of family life and specific spatial arrangements of the basic functions of cooking, sleeping and sanitation.

The observation that the built environment in the so-called “developing countries” was co-produced by actors from the “Global South” and the “Global North” among tensions, imbalances and inequalities as well as collaborations and was strongly transformed by various groups of local actors is one of the main messages that this book wants to transmit.

I Soviet Transfer: Strategies and Limits

Susanne Stein

Between ‘Self-Sovietisation’ and Soviet Assistance: Urban Planning and Design in China, 1950s–1960s

“News from China is scarce, particularly regarding the field of architecture,” the renowned German architectural journal *Bauwelt* observed in November 1957, adding that since the People’s Republic of China (PRC) had shut itself off from the unwelcome gaze of Western foreigners behind the “silk curtain” some ten years ago “hardly any European or American knows what is really going on in this country”.¹

Despite the acknowledged lack of reliable information on contemporary China and Chinese architecture, it was taken for granted that the country had actively followed the example of its closest political ally since 1949. For the author of the *Bauwelt* report a sample of drawings and layout plans chosen at random from the 1957 February and April issues of the Chinese language periodical *Architectural Journal*² sufficed to corroborate the assumption of an ongoing Chinese self-Sovietisation: “By chance we got hold of some issues of a Chinese journal of construction from the beginning of this year. They allow us to draw certain conclusions. [. . .]. Examples of industrial construction convey a plain and functional impression – but when it comes to ‘design’ the pervasive influence of the Russians who still adhere to ideas dating far back into the 19th century is conspicuous”.³

The travel accounts of a group of Western architects who had only recently returned from a “Journey to Peking” organised by the Architectural Society of China seem to have told a different story.⁴ Among the delegates were several high-

1 G. K., “Die Reise nach Peking. Zu Zeichnungen von Werner Hebebrand.” *Bauwelt* 47 (1957): 1246–1249, 1246. The author of the article could not be identified beyond their initials.

2 The *Architectural Journal* (*Jianzhu xuebao* 建筑学报) has been published monthly since 1954. It was the PRC’s first periodical on construction that covered a broad range of issues from architectural theory, building practice and design to questions of urban planning. See www.aj.org.cn/en/about.aspx (accessed 19 June 2022).

3 G. K., “Reise nach Peking,” 1246.

4 The Architectural Society of China (ASC; Zhongguo jianzhu xuehui 中国建筑学会) was founded in October 1953 with US-educated architects Liang Sicheng 梁思成 (1901–1972) and Yang Tingbao 杨廷宝 (1901–1982) successively serving as the society’s first directors. In 1955, the ASC became a

Note: I wish to thank Fabian Fechner for his comments on the manuscript and Andreas Seifert and Christoph Piechotta for image editing.

ranking professionals from East and West Germany such as Hamburg's senior city planner and architect Werner Hebebrand (1899–1966), senior architect Rudolf Hillenbrecht (1910–1999) from Hannover and Hans Hopp (1890–1971), president of the German Academy of Construction in East Berlin. The author of the *Bauwelt* article mentions that the German “China travellers” had witnessed “attempts at new forms” and the use of a “rejuvenated and genuinely Chinese style of construction” during their stay. But he immediately downplays their first-hand observations. From his point of view, Chinese construction professionals were “still showing a strong predilection for the ideas of their Soviet Russian colleagues” and continued to be preoccupied with designing “classical representative facades and decorative city plans” instead of finding ways to cope with the lack of “modern building materials” and alleviate the severe housing shortage in Chinese cities.⁵ Was this criticism justified or just another example of Cold War pigeonholing?

From the early 1950s onwards, enthusiastic Chinese self-portrayals had indeed nourished the notion of a pervasive Soviet impact on post-war reconstruction in the People's Republic. State propaganda emphasised that “Today's Soviet Union is our tomorrow”.⁶ The slogan became ubiquitous around 1954 and was frequently illustrated by a set of motifs showing Soviet-style skyscrapers amidst agro-industrial landscapes. (Fig. 1) These stereotypical projections of New China's future were circulated through the various genres of the period's print media, ranging from comic books, propaganda posters and popular readers to newspapers and academic journals.⁷

The imagery of socialist reconstruction did not just materialise on paper. A multitude of built structures emerging in China during the 1950s bore the hallmarks of “Soviet influence”. The architectural design and spatial layout of newly constructed administrative buildings, exhibition halls, industrial complexes, residential areas and various other public facilities unmistakably followed the principles of neo-classical Socialist Realism – the “other” International Style of modernity that seemed to characterise all “Cities of the Stalinist Empire”, regardless of their specific cultural con-

member of the International Union of Architects (UIA), an international non-governmental organisation uniting architects around the globe through a federation of their national organisations. See <http://www.chinaasc.org.cn/en/>; and <https://www.uia-architectes.org/en/about/about-the-uia/> (accessed 19 June 2022).

⁵ See G. K., “Die Reise nach Peking,” 1247.

⁶ *Sulian de jintian shi women de mingtian* 苏联的今天是我们的明天. The origin of this catchphrase remains obscure.

⁷ See, for example, the website chineseposters.net (accessed 19 June 2022) and Andreas Seifert, *Bildgeschichten für Chinas Massen. Comic und Comicproduktion im 20. Jahrhundert* (Köln: Böhlau, 2008).

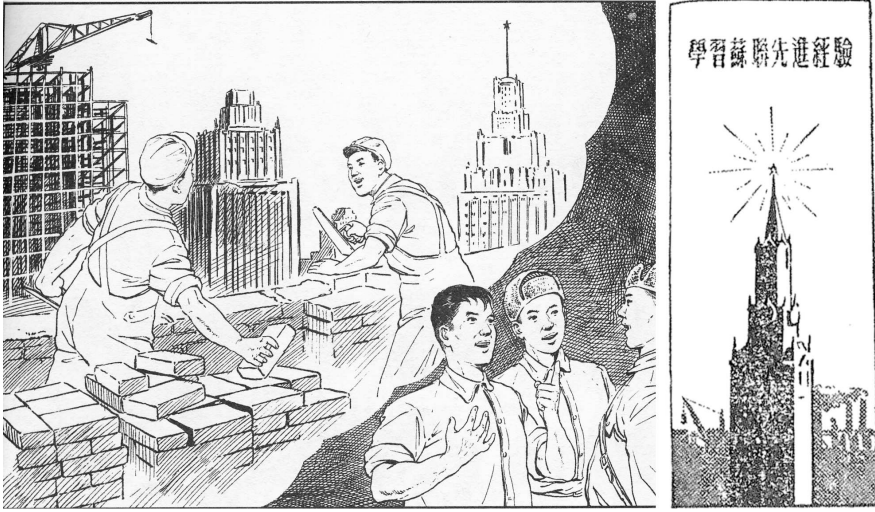


Fig. 1: China Reconstructs – “Learning from the Advanced Knowledge of the Soviet Union”. (Sources: Hua Sanchuan (Cartoonist), *Qianjin ba, zuguo!* [Forward, fatherland!] (Shanghai: Xin meishu chubanshe, 1955): picture 63; vignette from the journal *Jianzhu* [Construction] 2, 1954: 39).

texts.⁸ Within China, arguably the most outstanding buildings in this respect were the four exhibition halls built in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Wuhan between 1954 and 1956 to display the “Economic and Cultural Achievements of the Soviet Union” to the Chinese people.⁹ (Fig. 2) Equally noteworthy were the country’s key construction projects of heavy industry including their new residential areas. Most of them were designed and built during the period of the PRC’s first and second Five-Year-Plans (FYP, 1953–1957 and 1958–1962) with substantial

⁸ Greg Castillo, “Cities of the Stalinist Empire,” in *Forms of Dominance. On the Architecture of the Colonial Enterprise*, edited by Nezar AlSayyad, 261–287 (Aldershot: Avesbury, 1992). As Wolfgang Schivelbusch argues, monumentalist neo-classicism was “no less an ‘international style’” as modernism during the 1930s. See Schivelbusch, *Entfernte Verwandtschaft. Faschismus, Nationalsozialismus, New Deal, 1933–1939* (München: Hanser, 2005): 8–10.

⁹ The “Exhibition of the Economic and Cultural Achievements of the Soviet Union” (Sulian jingji ji wenhua jianshe chengjiu zhanlanhui 苏联经济及文化建设成就展览会) was staged to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the “Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance” (Zhong-Su youhao tongmeng huzhu tiaoyue 中苏友好同盟互助条约) signed on 14 February 1950. Starting in Beijing, the exhibition subsequently travelled from north to south. The Guangzhou exhibition hall was a “native” building designed by the city’s chief architect Lin Keming 林克明 (1901–1999), whereas the other three were built in cooperation with Soviet architects. See Sun Haigang 孙海刚, Zhong-Su youhao dasha. Guangzhou di-yi zuo ‘Sushi’ zhanlanguan 中苏友好大厦. 广州第一座“苏式”展览馆. www.gzzxws.gov.cn/gxsl/gzwb/ljsj/q/201703/t20170310_40550.htm (accessed 27 September 2019).



Fig. 2: Beijing Exhibition Hall (Beijing zhanlanguan).
(Source: Andreas Seifert 2001, private photo).

help from “Soviet experts”.¹⁰ To this day the industrial complexes of the era, among them the Changchun No. 1 Motor Works or the Luoyang No. 1 Tractor

¹⁰ According to the most prominent Chinese Cold War historian Shen Zhihua, there is still no exact data available concerning the total number of Soviet experts working in China between 1949 and 1960. Among other reasons this may be attributed to the variety of Chinese terms used to designate “Soviet experts”. Before “expert” (*zhuanjia* 专家) became the umbrella term for the various professionals and political functionaries from the Soviet Union (and other socialist countries) around 1957, those working in administration, management and the military were usually called “advisors” (*guwen* 顾问), whereas foreign experts in educational institutions were called