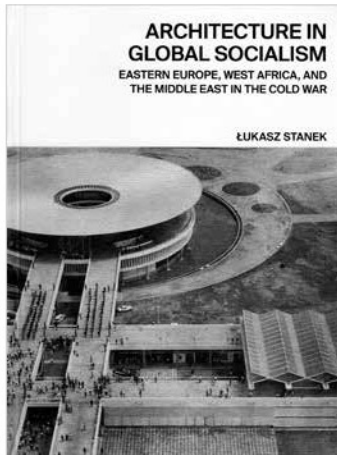


Book Reviews



Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War. By Łukasz Stanek. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020. 368 pp., 150 color + 127 b/w illus. ISBN 9780691168708.

In architectural history, it is rare that a single book reshapes the knowledge of an entire period. *Architecture in Global Socialism* does precisely that: it adds such a large piece to the puzzle of twentieth-century architecture that the decades of the Cold War can no longer be properly understood without it.

From the late 1950s until the global collapse of state socialism in the late 1980s, Eastern Europe exported an unprecedented amount of architectural and planning expertise, labor, technology and material to Africa and the Middle East, an effort that virtually re-invented entire cities. Motivated at first by anticolonial solidarity and later by increasing commercial pressures, designers, agencies and companies from socialist countries successfully competed with those from the capitalist West both for influence in the emerging global South and for a market share of it. Those of us who came of age in the last years of socialism have always been vaguely familiar with fragments of that story, but until Łukasz Stanek initiated his long-term research on the topic a decade ago no one fully understood the extent of such architectural exchanges. Reassembling these fragments into a coherent picture is one of the book's major achievements, making it clear that intense architectural interactions with the postcolonial world were common to practically all of Eastern Europe, rather than just one or another maverick country.

Of similar importance are the book's theoretical underpinnings. Stanek frames the story as a case of "worldmaking," which draws attention to its global scale; but it also highlights its distinction from the neoliberal globalization of the past half century, which is recast as only one among many possible versions of worldmaking. At the same time, Stanek reframes architectural history as a history of urbanization, which allows him to consider the production of architecture in relation to a wide range of topics, not least the global circulation of finance, goods and labor. Indeed, the entanglements with economy not only provide the background context for the analysis, but constitute one of its key dimensions, illuminating the changing roles that architecture played in the economy of socialist worldmaking. Despite such broad expansion of the disciplinary scope and scale, however, the book always remains anchored in architectural history through its consistent focus on the activities of the architectural profession.

The Cold War is typically understood as a sharp division, poignantly embodied in the figure of the Berlin Wall. But from the perspective of the global South, Stanek contends, a rather different picture emerges: not of division but rather of a competitive encounter. The book focuses on Accra, Lagos, Baghdad, Abu Dhabi, and Kuwait City as the places that underwent unusual degrees of architectural internationalization following the establishment of the independent states of, respectively, Ghana, Nigeria, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait. These rapidly modernizing cities became the privileged sites for a comparison of the practices, motivations and effectiveness of different overlapping networks of agents. Most East European architects who worked there acted within the integrative framework of the Comecon (Council of Mutual Economic Assistance), which sought to harmonize the economies of socialist countries under Soviet leadership. At the

same time, all five host countries, as well as Yugoslavia, belonged to another organization, the Non-Aligned Movement, which fought for the political and economic independence of former colonies, neutrality in their engagement with Cold War superpowers, and mutual solidarity on the path to modernization.

Last but not least, European metropolises continued to maintain their architectural presence in their former colonies long after decolonization, but they also had to contend with the new dominant power within the West's own ranks, the United States. As a result, actors of greatly varied cultural, ideological and economic backgrounds operated in close contact with each other, which naturally included a great deal of competition but also involved various forms of collaboration and mutual learning across geopolitical boundaries. The binary image of the Cold War world, which appears rather neat when seen from the global North, thus emerges as much more complicated when seen from the South. Consequently, it is not an exaggeration to say that, in order to fully understand the architecture of the era, one may learn less from going to Moscow or New York or Berlin than to Accra or Lagos or Baghdad.

This review is far too short to even begin doing justice to the complexity of Stanek's book and to the numerous story lines, architects, buildings, planning documents, clients, and agencies that it brings together. The specific case studies range from regional and urban plans and designs for individual buildings to ethnographic research and university curricula. Their geographical scope is equally impressive. In addition to the two African and three Middle Eastern countries mentioned above as destinations of architecture's mobility, the book covers no less than seven former East European states in which that architecture originated: Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the U.S.S.R., and Yugoslavia. The research is based on an even wider range of sources, including archives, periodicals and interlocutors from all the above-mentioned countries, as well as another six archives in the West.

The readers of this journal may find it especially relevant to learn that the book features extensive discussions of traditional settlements because East European architects played an important role in the study and modern reinterpretation of vernacular architecture in the global South. Particularly relevant in this respect is the extended section in Chapter 3 dedicated to the activities of the Polish architect Zbigniew Dmochowski, who applied his experience in studying the architecture of Polish villages to Nigeria. During his extended stays there between 1958 and 1981, Dmochowski designed several regional museums based on vernacular typologies, including the Museum of Traditional Nigerian Architecture in the city of Jos. Of equal importance were his extensive ethnographic studies, which resulted in the monumental three-volume *Introduction to Nigerian Traditional Architecture*, published posthumously in an incomplete form in 1990.

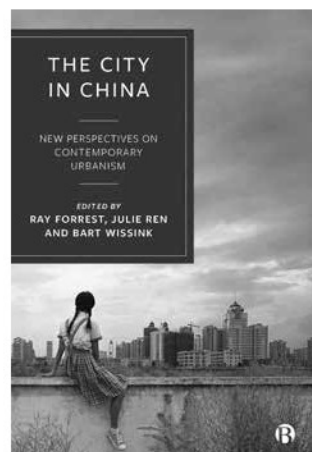
Another relevant case presented by Stanek involves discussions of traditional Islamic architecture as a basis for contemporary design in the Persian Gulf, which came as a backlash in the 1970s and 1980s against the placeless of previous foreign-led modernization. Again, the experience acquired back home allowed East Europeans to claim competence for such tasks in the Middle East. For example, Bulgarian architects and contractors, who were responsible for a number of high-profile projects in Abu Dhabi, made sure to advertise their competence in preserving their own Islamic heritage back home. However, the result of such efforts was not the preservation of the existing vernacular, but more often than not a form of postmodernism that merely applied traditional ornament to ubiquitous modern typologies such as administration buildings or conference centers.

In sum, *Architecture in Global Socialism* is a groundbreaking work that provides both a theoretical framework and an empirical map for future research. As such, it is certain to be an indispensable reference in the history of twentieth-century architecture for many years to come.

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The City in China, New Perspectives on Contemporary Urbanism. Edited by Ray Forrest, Julie Ren, and Bart Wissink. Bristol, U.K.: Bristol University Press, 2019. 272 pp., 40 b&w illus. ISBN 987-1-5292-0549-7 (e-pub).



This book came about from a workshop held at City University Hong Kong. It demonstrates the considerable value of asking academics to bring their multiple points of view, look through a particular lens, and then attempt to learn something from what comes out. The book is a product of that kind of miracle that occasionally happens when researchers come together and symbiotically

evolve in their research and perspective. As a reader, I was left not only with a new appreciation for a diverse range of issues confronting Chinese cities but with a greater sense of the struggles of urban studies as a discipline — and from a personal point of view with an avenue for further exploration of the difficulties that an ontological approach to research could seek to successfully engage.

The book takes as a starting point Robert Park's 1915 essay "The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the City Environment," which is described as founding the Chicago School of thought about urbanism, and indeed American sociology (Ch.1: Xufei Ren, "Robert Park in China: From the Chicago School to Urban China Studies"). Park is described as producing a kind of conceptual-theoretical understanding of social realities in cities through the development of ethnographical fieldwork which observed social processes and mapped their location (Ch.1: Ren; and Ch.2: Bettina Gransow, "'Bewitched by the History Behind the Walls': Robert Park and the Arch of Urban Sociology from Chicago to China").

Park was apparently informed by notions that human societies function as a result of such natural processes as competition, mediated by culture (Ch.5: Ray Forrest, "From Chicago to Shenzhen, via Birmingham: Zones of Transition and Dreams of Homeownership"). And it was this thinking, along with a tendency to ignore broader political and economic processes that structure society that eventually led to the downfall of the Chicago School within the discipline (Ch.3: Fulong Wu and Zheng Wang, "Moral Order in the Post-Socialist Chinese City: Generating a Dialogue with Robert E. Park's 'The City'"). However, in taking up the challenge of the relevance of Park's essay to modern China, the book is looking not to reinstate Park, but to open a dialogue with his approach to understanding the city.

The book wrestles with the question of the place of Chinese urban studies in a broader urbanism literature. It argues that there is a kind of exceptionalism in China studies (Ch.12: Julie Ren, "Conclusion: Everyday Cities, Exceptional Cases"). This has created a situation where Chinese urban research is about Chinese cities, which are necessarily situated in a Chinese history, which in turn leads to an analysis which relies on the particularities of Chinese historical and state practices. This leads to the uninspiring conclusion that Chinese cities are this way because they are Chinese. However, Bart Wissink (Ch.4: "Learning from Chicago (and LA)? The Contemporary Relevance of Western Urban Theory for China") argues that more comparison between China and elsewhere could provide greater scope for a movement away from universalism within urban theory, and it might likewise allow for something to be learned about other places from Chinese studies.

Such contentions are supported by an analysis of competition for housing in Shenzhen, (Ch.5: Forrest, p.81) which asks, "Are the processes of urban change, urban conflict and the competition for housing very different in Chinese cities when compared to the experiences of their Western counterparts or are we mesmerized by the scale and pace of change in China so that the quantitatively different is sometimes mistaken for the qualitatively different?" Comparison is also made by Jan Nijman (Ch.6: "Urbanisation and Economic Development: Comparing the Trajectories of China and the United States"), who usefully explores what kind of trajectory Chinese cities might experience in the (nearer) future as a result of changes to China's economic structure from a focus on second-tier industrial processes (factory-based production) to third-tier industries (finance, IT, services). Nijman's conclusion is that the pace of change in the economy coupled with the rapidly aging population will mean that Chinese cities are unlikely to experience the same sort of evisceration as has been the case in places like Detroit or the Ruhr Valley.

The latter chapters of the book engage more explicitly with the "social structures and processes, and at human agency in the light of the transformational effects of the urban environment," seen to be the seminal contribution of Park's "The City" (Ch.6: Nijman, p.101). These chapters variously explore the impact of mobility through a range of ethnographic studies: of life, exclusion and assimilation in the Baishizhou area of Shenzhen (Ch.7: Mary Ann O'Donnell, "The Handshake 302 Village Hack Residency: Chicago, Shenzhen and the Experience of Assimilation"); of the structuring role of ring roads in Beijing (Ch.8: Jeroen de Kloet, "Beijing Ring Roads and Poetics of Excess and Ordinarity"); of the relationship of different pathways to urban residency on subjective well-being (Ch.9: Juan Chen and Shenghua Xie, "Pathways to Urban Residency and Subjective Well-Being in Beijing"); of the experience of migrant workers in factory enclaves in Shenzhen (Ch.10: Zhigang Li, Shunxian Ou, and Rong Wu, "A Study of Socio-spatial Segregation of Rural Mi-

grants in Shenzhen: A Case of Foxconn"); and of the experience of middle-class anxiety in Beijing (Ch.11: Tai-lok Lui and Shuo Liu, "The Anxious Middle Class of Urban China: Its Emergence and Formation").

As a resident in China of five years, with Chinese friends who I watch living out the daily struggle between hometown and trying to build a life in a big city, these chapters lent me insight, not just as an academic urban planner, but also into the life that those friends have been trying to explain to me. This is no small achievement, and it expresses to me the importance of research which follows Park's approach.

Finally, as a researcher who engages mostly in the question of infrastructure in cities (and who thus is often surrounded by interpretations of the city as "places of relative density of buildings and infrastructure"), I was particularly struck by the implied definition of urbanism in the chapters. Park is described as feeling that the city should be regarded as not just a congregation of people, but as an institution that has its own concept and structure (Ch.3: Wu and Wang). This could be interpreted as an allusion to the physical structures (as in infrastructure) that make up the city. However, the further I read the more it became clear that the structures referred to are not physical. Rather, they imply a concept of a structured moral order within the city: a concept of right behavior which is structured both in the interactions between people and through external forces such as housing affordability and availability, migration, industrialization, and segregation.

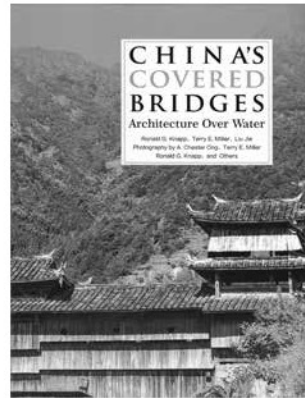
The work in this book struggles to deal with whether these intangible structures are constructed by individual agency, or whether they structure that agency. This struggle is also present when talking about tangible structures: Are they constructed by individuals or by the intangible structures? Or are they structuring either or both of those things?

Thus, I am left with a new avenue through which to consider both the usefulness of an ontological approach (with its attempt to understand the being-in-the-worldness of all being), and also a new respect for the extreme difficulty of dealing with such an approach when armed with a language that can only speak of subjects and objects.

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Chinese Covered Bridges: Architecture over Water. Ronald G. Knapp, Terry E. Miller, and Liu Jie. Photos by A. Chester Ong, Terry E. Miller, Ronald G. Knapp, and others. Shanghai: Shanghai Jiao Tong University Press, 2019 (distributed by University of Hawaii Press). 480 pp., 600+ color and b&w illus. ISBN 978-1952461026.



Covered bridges are a significant typology in the study of Chinese architecture, and this volume is a well-done, timely addition to more-discussed Chinese structures like temples, pagodas, palaces, and large courtyard houses. Unlike them, covered bridges are usually found in mountainous rural areas, where they were historically built to facilitate the year-round

transport of goods, including salt from coastal regions to inland provinces and timber from mountainous regions to the coast. Small bridges could also be built in mountainous areas out of woven ropes for pedestrians only, or out of stone and wood for carts and pedestrians.

The book is organized in three parts, with part one comparing Chinese covered bridges — their usage, location, structure and construction — with examples from other countries, particularly in Europe and North America. Chinese covered bridges, besides being used to carry people and goods across rivers and gorges, often had a unique social and cultural component. The authors thus highlight their spiritual aspect and their relation to conceptions of *qi*. Beyond considerations of utility, *qi* was important when determining their exact location, and violations of *qi* were unacceptable. With good *qi*, a bridge could even serve as a place for worshipping local deities, particularly if there were no temples nearby. Local people might thus put small altars to one side of the entry portal to a bridge to ensure safe passage. Sometimes a larger altar would even be installed at the middle of the bridge to serve as a place for local religious practices.

Because covered bridges were sometimes the only significant large gathering spaces in rural regions, they might additionally serve general community purposes. As the largest, most prominent covered area in a village, they might thus be used for weddings, banquets, celebrations, theater performances, or food markets. And the incorporation of benches along both sides might allow local people to use them more casually on a daily basis to rest, meet neighbors, or catch an evening breeze. Since there were no inns in most villages, covered bridges were also designed as places for travelers to rest, spend a night, or shelter from storms.

Part two of the book discusses the locations of some 3,000 covered bridges in the mountainous regions of southern China today. This section is broken into a discussion of seven areas: northern Fujian-southern Zhejiang; southern Fujian, Jiangxi, and northern Guangdong; Guangxi and Guizhou; Hunan and Hubei; Yunnan and Sichuan; Hebei and Shanxi; and Gansu, Qinghai, and eastern Tibet. These are all regions historically populated by minorities, with little connection to the central government in the north, and such community isolation might result in unique bridge-building techniques. One such characteristic practice, available through the centuries, was the use of whole tree trunks as beams to produce a stacked, “woven” cantilever.

Small covered bridges, *langqiao* (signifying a narrow covered corridor bridge for pedestrians and small carts), were often similar in design to the wooden covered walkways built in large Chinese gardens and courtyard houses. The roof of a *langqiao* was typically constructed of clay tile over a timber frame, and the structure might be augmented with decorated railings. Another type of narrow covered bridge was the *tingqiao*. It featured a taller space, a pavilion at midspan, and often multiple, layered roofs, and was specifically seen as a place for people to tarry.

As the authors explain, the “woven arch” describes a bridge typology found in southern Fujian and northern Guangdong. “Woven bridge” terminology describes a polygonal arch system made of multiple elements that work together to provide stability and increase the length of potential spans. Although some of these bridges date to as early as the fourteenth century, there is hardly a piece of any of them that has not been replaced through the centuries.

Another typology were stone and log-beam covered bridges in Guangxi and Guizhou. These were built by the Miao and Dong ethnic groups using full tree trunks and massive stone towers to span more than 200 feet. Their great length was achieved by extending logs out in layers, each further than the next, until the center gap could be closed. These typically show no indication of triangulation to achieve a true truss. But the advantage of the layering was that each layer of logs extended out during construction could be used as scaffolding for the next.

Yet another type — stone arch bridges with a wooden structure above — were built by the Tujia community in areas of Hunan and Hubei. Their wooden structures could be elaborate, with much decoration common to those regions. A complex, angled wooden structure in Yunnan, built by the Bai minority, also used beams projecting upward with their bottom ends embedded in abutments, in a manner quite different from a true cantilever. These wood structural members were always covered to protect them from extreme weather. Logs were also spaced apart to allow airflow, and so minimize mildew and other undesirable effects of the damp climate.

Part three, the bulk of the book, provides a photographic record of bridges in various regions of China. The individual photos portray their wide variety and physical condition. Locations are also given, which is vital for people interested in finding these structures, since most are located off well-traveled paths.

The locational information shows how routes of travel once served by covered bridges have largely been replaced by modern highways. And their discontinuance as practical transportation infrastructure means there is no longer government funding for their maintenance. Many may thus not be around much longer. Interestingly, the covered bridges in southern and southwestern China that seem to be best maintained are those used actively as local social spaces, or for which new uses have been created, such as through the addition of an elaborate temple at midspan to attract tourists.

It is unfortunate that there are few historical records of most of these covered bridges either at the local or national level, and books on Chinese bridge-building are few. Perhaps, being utilitarian structures, they have warranted less scholarship. Or perhaps, because most were built in mountainous regions inhabited by supposedly barbaric minorities, in areas far from the centers of power, they were never deemed important. The authors express frustration that complete records on the bridges — when they were built, by whom, and with what methods and materials — are rare. Thus, even though books mentioning them appear as early as the twelfth century, no official drawings or written records exist, despite many bridges having needed to be rebuilt repeatedly after floods and big storms. Since there are few such records, one has to rely on oral history to understand their origins.

The Chinese government’s emphasis on building modern highways and bridges in the country’s outer mountainous regions means there are few plans and little funding to maintain these old timber bridges. Many covered bridges are thus certain to collapse and perish within the next five to ten years. However, the detailed photos in this book will provide a record of the great variety of these structures, and the locational information will help other researchers find them before they have totally disappeared. *China’s Covered Bridges* is a timely reference for scholars of this fascinating and endangered genre. I hope it is just a beginning, and that many more studies, sparked by it, are yet to come.

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Open Architecture for the People: Housing Development in Post-War Japan. Shuichi Matsumura. London and New York: Routledge, 2020. 182 pp., 30+ b&w illus. ISBN 9780367785086.



What will be the role of the architect in the future? To propose an answer, it is first necessary to define where architecture stands today and explain how it arrived at this condition. In this book, University of Tokyo Professor Shuichi Matsumura argues that such a historical trajectory with regard to Japanese architecture should be based on the concept of “openness.” Ideally, he writes,

architecture should allow people independence in satisfying their living needs, and over the last seventy years architects in Japan have pursued this vision through a series of practical and theoretical paradigms. However, in the future, this quality may come to be more and more about letting building design be “open to play” for people who are not architectural professionals. Drawing on work that has to date been largely unavailable to Western audiences, the book seeks to chart the feasibility of such a new phase of “open architecture,” and it suggests directions the profession might take in realizing it.

In his introduction, Matsumura outlines how between 1950 and 2018 contemporary Japan has passed through three distinct phases in its search for an open architecture. These have involved characteristic themes interpreted through systems of industrial production, marketing acumen, and translations of vernacular principles.

Chapter one describes the first phase, which involved the widespread acceptance of modernization. Thus, after World War II, in response to a growing population and the need to rebuild on a massive scale, a new industrial model was developed that sought to provide housing for a modern nation. Until 1973 this aimed to mass-produce housing so that anyone could lead a healthy life according to “standard design.” Matsumura refers to this output as “boxes.” This may seem a far cry from present concepts of “open architecture.” But, as he points out, the era introduced a new starting point: one where every modern citizen could own a proper house in which to live freely and independently in their own space — a condition previously attainable only to the rich.

Starting in the 1970s, however, a second phase of “open architecture” transformed this production system into “industrialization for the people,” as residents were pushed to make a series of choices. In his second and third chapters, Matsumura then describes how this phase moved beyond the strict logic of mass production to restore the independence

of inhabitants and their personal relationship to the dwelling. While still making use of modern technology, this was realized through a system that opened itself to the market, decomposed housing units according to identifiable vernacular elements and allowing people to select and combine features as they liked.

As an example of how this worked, Matsumura discusses the continued utility of the Japanese *tatami* floor mat, a feature of traditional housing design for hundreds of years. Even ordinary people could imagine the size of rooms when described by the number of *tatami* mats, making it easy for them to understand their choices. But throughout this second phase, the housing industry was still premised to a large degree on prefabrication — even if component options expanded to a dizzying degree, through which residents were guided by skilled salespeople.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, a third phase of “open architecture,” one to do with creating “places,” has now arrived in Japan. In part this has been precipitated by changing demographics — as family structure, types of employment, and life-work balance have become diversified, and as the country faces a historically unprecedented decrease in its population. As the Japanese population ages, increasing numbers of young people are also migrating to vacant houses and buildings in rural areas.

In the last three chapters, Matsumura thus examines the new trend of creating “places” to enrich inhabitants’ lives, using the existing supply of “boxes,” technological advances, and shared knowledge and experience. He proposes that these new “places” be focused on people’s “manner,” which can arise in any number of ways through feedback with human activities. One example he gives is the renovation of a silk factory in Kiryu City — a ten-year effort to restore the building, undertaken without prior purpose or goal. Instead, it was cleaned and its machines were fixed, so that the building’s spaces might return to how they had once been — but this time as a place for “personal entertainment.”

At the end of the book, Matsumura notes how this idea of “play” can enrich life in the future. With the present abundant stock of empty structures in Japan as a resource, people don’t have to be experts to create architecture. Greater chances can and should be afforded for ordinary people to create, remake, and manage new forms of open architecture.

In conclusion, the book provides informative reading, especially for people unfamiliar with architectural trends in Japan today. The history of the Japanese housing environment in the twentieth century in Chapters 1 to 3 is well researched and described. And chapters 4 and 5 include the author’s real experience, which make it easy to understand his views with regard to what he sees as the third phase of open architecture. For me, however, the last chapter seems a little vague, since the cases of “play” he proposes are mainly art-related, and may only be possible under particular conditions.

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