

Non-Aligned Architecture: China's Designs on and in Ghana and Guinea, 1955–92

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The current international attention devoted to contemporary Chinese-financed and constructed development in Africa has tended to obscure complex and multivalent histories of the relationships between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and numerous African nations; and many of these histories date back decades.¹ The ideological origins behind socialist China's engagement with Africa, and the geopolitical dynamics that continue to propel them forward, trace back to the time of Chairman Mao Zedong, who first coined the term 'intermediate zone' in 1946 to position the vast expanse of contested territories and undecided loyalties existing between the ideological poles of the Soviet Union and the United States after World War II.² Nine years later (1955), at the first Non-Aligned Movement conference held in Bandung, Indonesia, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai declared that

ever since modern times most of the countries of Asia and Africa in varying degrees have been subjected to colonial plunder and oppression, and have thus been forced to remain in a stagnant state of poverty and backwardness [...]. We need to develop our countries independently with no outside interference and in accordance with the will of the people.³

Delivered to an audience of participating African countries including Egypt, Ethiopia, Liberia, Libya, Sudan, and the Gold Coast (as colonial Ghana was then known), Zhou's speech reinvigorated Mao's initial vision with ideological urgency. It alluded not only to the exploitative mechanisms behind colonialism but to the archetypal postcolonial model for economic growth rapidly taking its place: the importation of technocratic expertise from the Soviet Union, the United States and their allies, as well as their multilateral armatures (such as the World Bank, UNESCO and the Ford Foundation) to help fund, design, and manage large-scale architectural and urban development projects in other, relatively less developed parts of the world.⁴

Recent scholarly efforts to understand these projects, and the economic, political and cultural dynamics at work behind them, have begun to reveal extensive international networks existing both within and between the so-called First, Second and Third Worlds.⁵ A rich and varied range of new terms and ideas has emerged in relation to this work, each broadly organised around the central referent of Modernism; and these include, among others, notions such as 'anxious Modernisms', 'alternative Modernities', the 'colonial Modern' and 'Third World Modernism'.⁶ Collectively, these efforts have

helped in illuminating Modernism's mutability in the face of economic, political or cultural difference and, by extension, the fluid multiplicity of Modernity itself.⁷ Yet lacunae remain. As standard narratives describing unidirectional and Eurocentric flows of building designs, people, institutions and ideas have given way to more nuanced descriptions of hybridised and 'two-way' processes of interaction,⁸ the regions, countries and territories — the 'intermediate zone' as coined by Mao — that may appear only tangentially affected by any discernible vectors of exchange continue to figure as largely peripheral to these histories. The multidirectional and transnational complexities at work in Modernism's global presence, too, remain difficult to discern.

This article concerns Communist China's architectural influence in West Africa, which offers an important example of Modern architectural production and exchange that challenges the narrative of Modernism's global, post-World War II history as it is currently understood. Following the Bandung conference, and over the course of the early 1960s, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officials devised an alternative development model to those proposed by either their American- or Soviet-allied rivals — a strategy aimed at providing non-aligned, egalitarian and mutually beneficial aid in the form of collaborations between China and Africa in construction projects. China was by no means alone in these efforts: other so-called non-aligned nations, such as Yugoslavia, also employed architecture as part of their own diplomatic efforts in the region.⁹ Yet China's architectural diplomacy, which may be understood as the construction of buildings by Chinese experts in Africa in a strategic effort to curry favour with African leaders, was unique in several respects. China's projects were conceived, first of all, on the basis of perceived political economic and social commonalities within the Global South, which comprised nations from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and formed an area of geopolitical marginality lying beyond continental Europe that Mao himself described in militaristic terms as 'a single united front'.¹⁰ China's strategy, moreover, was grounded in its own successful revolution against imperialism. It was to use CCP officials to transform the developing world's relative weaknesses into a shared position of strength through radical action, a strategy that held appeal to many newly decolonised African leaders who saw Chinese architectural projects as concretised visions of economic and political independence — unlike any proposed by American or Soviet bloc-led international aid work.¹¹ Such engagement also carried significant value for China, particularly given its growing isolation amid US-led trade embargos and following the deterioration of Sino-Soviet Union relations in 1960 amid conflict over international communist party control and leadership.¹²

It is clear that Chinese-designed and managed projects represented an important medium through which China established and promoted its own ideological agenda abroad, and particularly in Africa. One contemporary scholar, for example, has argued that these projects embodied the emergence of a new, Modern Chinese architecture forged by the 'synchronic temporality and shared spatiality' taking shape between Communist China and other Third World countries at the time.¹³ Yet, in fact, and as this article argues, China's architectural engagement with West Africa was neither as synchronic nor as shared as one might presume. As symbolic rejections of both colonial-era dependencies and the polarised allegiances demanded by the Cold War, China's architectural initiatives in Africa depended upon ideological and technical practices that would

allow China to burnish its own political and economic influence and empower newly decolonised African citizens while mitigating the complex, often contradictory cultural interplays such engagement often presented. Evaluating China's post-war architectural history in Africa thus requires some detailed consideration not merely of the physical forms of architectural expression, but also of the operative mechanisms through which architectural expertise flowed, and the knowledge these operations were able to produce. Indeed, and as the architectural historian Thomas Markus asserts with regard to architectural design today, 'asymmetries of power hinge not on steam power but on systems for handling information'.¹⁴ Chinese and African leaders, in their own time, lauded the non-hierarchical, intensely collaborative nature of these projects in contrast to what they considered to be the imperialist and 'revisionist' imbalances between foreign and local expertise on display in American- and Soviet-funded work, respectively.¹⁵ Examining both the works produced and the methods by which they were realised, however, reveals a kind of Modern architecture stemming from the kinds of power imbalances that China's architectural diplomacy was purportedly designed to replace, and one that provides valuable context to the uncertain trajectory of Chinese architectural and infrastructural production continuing to take shape throughout the African continent today.

In an effort to disaggregate the unique experiences of individual African nations from the continent as a whole, this article attends specifically to the rise of China's architectural and infrastructural influence in the West African countries of Ghana and Guinea. Ghana and Guinea were the first two sub-Saharan colonies to declare their independence from Great Britain and France, in 1957 and 1959 respectively, and the first two sub-Saharan countries to be recognised by the PRC. Each was led by a charismatic leader sympathetic to Maoist rhetoric and committed to bold, socialist-inspired political action: Kwame Nkrumah (1909–72), the Ghanaian-born, American-educated reformer who rose to power through Ghana's independence movement before being formally elected as the first president of the Republic of Ghana on July 1, 1960; and Sékou Touré (1922–84), founder of the People's Democracy of Guinea who steered the country's independence from France and became the first leader of a decolonised African country to visit China.¹⁶ Both Nkrumah and Touré were known for publically lauding the productiveness with which the PRC had tackled its own industrial development.¹⁷ Equally importantly, the two countries were active zones in late colonial and Cold War-era scrambles for geopolitical influence and the architectural production that resulted. In this respect, each country offered China more than simply diplomatic recognition or economic reciprocity. Ghana and Guinea also served as important vantage points from which China could observe and participate in the transitional, Cold War-era machinations that would reshape governments and economies, while also reconfiguring architectural expression around the world.

ORIGINS OF AN ARCHITECTURAL STRATEGY

The first socialist Chinese buildings in Guinea and Ghana consisted of a series of temporary exhibition halls, constructed in Conakry in December 1960 and Accra in August 1961, in connection with a series of cooperative agreements signed between Touré, Nkrumah and the Chinese government (Figs 1, 2 and 3). Industrial exhibitions

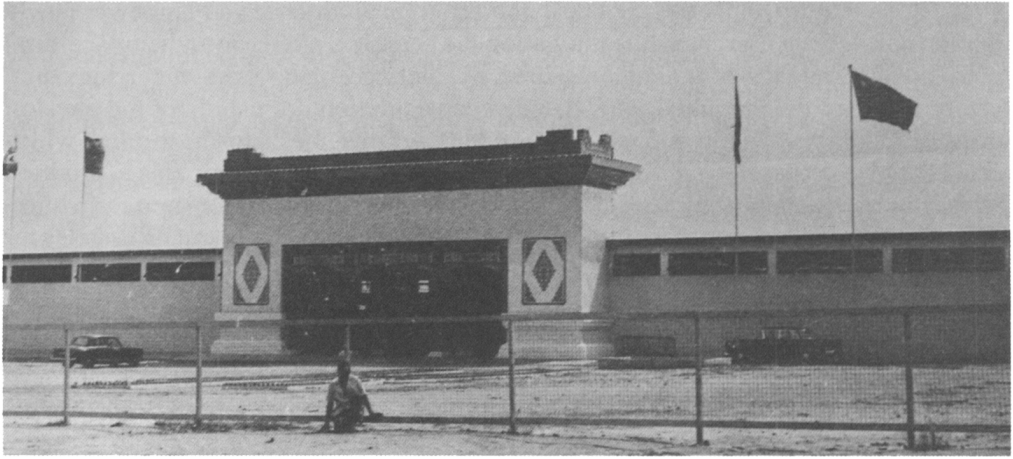


Fig. 1. Chinese exhibition hall, Accra (photograph of 1961; *Ghana Today*, 5, 31 January 1962; *New York Public Library, General Research & Reference Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations*)

were prominent Cold-War-era instruments in the rush for political and economic influence around the world, and the halls formed part of a concerted CCP effort to promote Chinese manufactured products and goods abroad in far-flung locales, such as Damascus (Syria), Havana (Cuba), Khartoum (Sudan), Rangoon (Burma) and Santiago (Chile), amid China's widening economic turmoil and international isolation during the Great Leap Forward (1958–61) (Fig. 4).¹⁸ Externally, each of the African buildings featured ceremonial *pailou*, or gateways, decorated with abstracted roof ornamentation and décor reminiscent of imperial-era Chinese patterning. Within these halls, guests were greeted with a series of pictorial displays and items of machinery arranged to introduce international audiences to the marvels of socialist Chinese technological innovation and achievement. In the Accra exhibition, an estimated 3,800 objects drawn from various sectors of China's economy, including heavy and light industry, agriculture, culture, education, and publishing, were displayed along with models and photographs depicting 'everyday life and struggle' in China.¹⁹ In addition, a variety of architectural models complementing the examples of Chinese-manufactured machinery helped to convey both the scale and sophistication of China's production capabilities.

The evident rupture in signification between these exhibition halls' exuberant exteriors, which made reference to China's imperial architectural past, and their interior contents, which celebrated modern socialist China's technological achievements, underscored the delicate manoeuvring needed to successfully promote socialist China's political and commercial mission abroad. The buildings' external reliance on familiar, imperial-era architectonic tropes of 'Chinese-ness' reinforced stereotypical images of a static and entrenched Chinese culture that may have seemed to run counter to the CCP's founding principles. Their exterior decoration also contradicted domestic Chinese architectural debate at the time urging architects, after years of experimentation with Soviet-inspired socialist realism, to embrace unadorned, more functionalist design.²⁰ Behind



Fig. 2. *Guineans visit the Chinese exhibition hall, Conakry (photograph of 1960; Duiwai Maoyang, 6, 1962)*

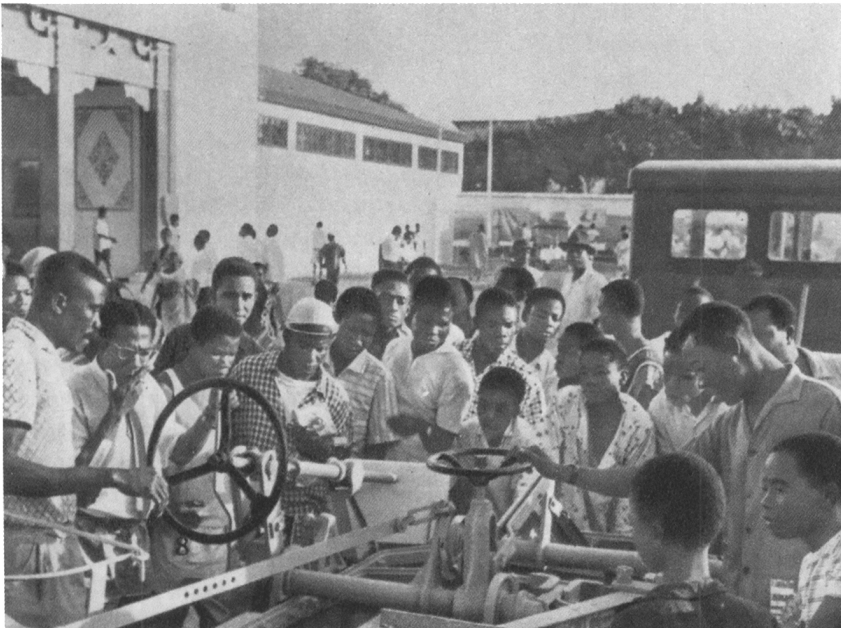


Fig. 3. *Ghanaians visit the Chinese exhibition hall, Accra (photograph of 1961; Duiwai Maoyang, 1, 1962)*



Fig. 4. *Chinese trade exhibition, Havana (photograph of 1961; China Reconstructs, 2, 1961)*

these rather gaudy ‘Chinese’ façades, however, lay another set of considerations specific to socialist China’s new international diplomatic mission.

The first of these concerned China’s continuing struggle, not only with Taiwan, but also with British-controlled Hong Kong, over China’s cultural and political purview.²² More than an impulsive reaction against Soviet influence, or a selfless attempt to support nascent African nation-states, China’s interest in Africa stemmed in large part from its desire to gain diplomatic recognition at the United Nations following the loss of its seat in 1949 to the ‘Republic of China’ — i.e. Taiwan — amid intensive American lobbying and despite the decisive Communist victory in 1949 in the country’s civil war.²² Proving the PRC’s long-term sustainability as the only viable ‘China’ depended upon a certain degree of international diplomatic acceptance, and Party leaders saw the dozens of imminently decolonising countries throughout Africa as potential allies in these efforts. Few of Africa’s new leaders knew very much about China, however, and Mao’s occasionally nihilistic revolutionary fervour risked compromising efforts at diplomacy.²³ Years of educational training in colonial-era, Eurocentric political and economic dogma

coupled with the geopolitical complexities resulting from China's civil war, had also made distinguishing the PRC from its major cultural and political rivals difficult.²⁴ The PRC's exhibition halls were thus offered as impressive, self-consciously Orientalising, but ultimately non-threatening and easily identifiable icons that would resonate with those officials and residents for whom China remained a contested, ill-defined entity.

Another catalytic influence on China's architectural initiatives in West Africa was its deteriorating relationship with the Soviet Union (Fig. 5). Over the course of the 1950s, the Soviet Union and other socialist-bloc countries provided China with technology, blueprints, and building experts in an effort to help it develop its state-run economy. These exchanges often took public form as industrial exhibitions, many of which featured displays that prefigured China's exhibition halls in Ghana and Guinea in their emphasis on China's industrial progress as well as its traditional culture.²⁵ In 1960, however, and following disagreement between Chairman Mao and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev over the Party's international strategy, the Soviet Union began to remove its engineering experts, equipment and plans from the country, leaving China without its major source of international technological exchange. Denied its major supply of advanced technological knowledge, China's continued industrial development required new sources of what may be termed 'design intelligence' as well as new arenas for international interaction and experimentation.²⁶ Significantly, therefore, China established embassies in Conakry in December 1959 and Accra in August 1960, denoting both Guinea and Ghana, just prior to the building of the exhibition halls there, as important new architectural as well as diplomatic terrain.

Although dependent on a comparable diplomatic strategy, the halls in Accra and Conakry diverged in several key respects from any Soviet equivalents in China, which included the monumental Soviet Exhibition Hall, built in Beijing in 1953 to the design of Sergei Andreyev, as well as the Sino-Soviet Friendship Building constructed as part of the Shanghai exhibition complex in 1955.²⁷ The realities of China's own domestic economic precariousness in the wake of the Great Leap Forward, for example, made material and structural thrift essential, and these priorities were reflected in the design ideology embodied by the halls, which were self-evidently temporary constructions.²⁸ While the boldly identifiably Chinese aesthetics on external display ingratiated the country to local populations through exotic spectacle, the tectonic simplicity inside the structures implicitly acknowledged socialist China's own humble but dogged industriousness while involving local labour in both their construction and demolition. For example, in Conakry, it was reported that news of the exhibition hall's construction prompted Guineans to bring their own tools from home to help cut the grass and level the ground for the site.²⁹ In Accra, Chinese engineers in charge of the exhibition hall purportedly insisted that its supporting steel posts be recycled and reused by Ghanaian workers following the event's close.³⁰ In both cases, the processes by which each structure was constructed were promoted by Chinese officials and its state-run media as being as significant as the finished, temporary product itself, lending weight to the transactional value of shared practice and knowledge exchange over any completed architectural project.

Equally important to these halls' significance as emblems of non-aligned collaboration were the financial mechanisms underlying them. The state-controlled nature of China's



Fig. 5. 'Study the Soviet Union's Advanced Manufacturing Experience in order to Improve China's Own Industrialization' (poster of 1953; Amsterdam, International Institute of Social History, Stefan R. Landsberger Collection)

economy left it primarily reliant upon commodity rather than currency exchange, meaning aid packages were often grounded in the products countries were willing and able to offer China in return for its own goods and services. Any agreement over cooperation thus required a mutual trading interest and a certain degree of shared ideological initiative, but it also saw China taking other initiatives as well.³¹ While massive aid projects implemented by a superpower such as the United States came with risks of exploitation of natural resource or 'strategic materials' extraction,³² China promoted its own support system as a series of simple commodity credit agreements whereby Chinese goods worth the equivalent of a particular loan could be imported into the partnered country, and the proceeds from their sale could then be used to purchase a partner's goods or to support local costs incurred by Chinese technicians. Other loans took the form of long-term, no-interest bank credits to be repaid through the purchasing of Chinese products and materials.³³ Architecturally, such arrangements were made manifest by the exhibition halls themselves.

The loose mutability of China's diplomatic outreach to Ghana and Guinea as embodied by its exhibition halls was further conditioned by China's own anomalous geopolitical standing. China had the largest population in the world and an ample abundance of resources, with a total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that in 1960 made it the world's sixth largest economy. On a *per capita* basis, however, China's production was at just 92 US dollars per person, or at around the same level as the newly decolonised countries of Nigeria (91 US dollars) and Benin (93 US dollars) and less than half that of Ghana (181 US dollars).³⁴ Such statistical dissonances provided Chinese leaders with broad rhetorical latitude to claim common ground with poorer African countries, such as Guinea, at the same time as touting its existing industrial clout to Africa's wealthier countries, which included Ghana.³⁵ Yet although China's leaders were eager to capitalise upon the sheer quantity of their country's population to achieve a kind of international clout on a par with the United States or the Soviet Union, CCP officials also reminded observers that China remained firmly committed to the cause of a 'Third World' revolution against American as well as Soviet oppression.³⁶ Thus China's first architectural endeavours in West Africa drew upon these dualities — and on its well-crafted image as a nation-state borne of transformative socialist revolution and an age-old cultural heritage, but with significant potential for global ascendance despite its own dire economic condition — in an effort to ingratiate themselves to Ghanaian and Guinean hosts struggling with post-colonial ambiguities of their own. Subsequent, more ambitious Chinese architectural initiatives in Ghana and Guinea would attempt to capitalise upon such good will, although without abandoning the ideological imperative upon which these initial efforts were based.

EXPERIMENTAL FIELDS, 1961–67

Despite the unusual nature of China's exhibition halls in Ghana and Guinea, they were quickly overshadowed, in November 1961, by the construction of a larger, eight-and-a-half-acre American trade fair in Accra, providing 123 individual company booths and a US Department of Agriculture demonstration exhibit as well as an *Ebony* magazine fashion show.³⁷ The contrast, however, helped to underscore the non-threatening tenor

of China's modest architectural ambitions in Africa at a time in which many newly appointed African leaders were increasingly anxious over the cultural and political implications of foreign aid and uncontrolled international industrial expansion. By 1960, the term 'neo-colonialism' had begun to emerge in relation to what officials saw as the simple substitution of Europe's colonial systems by other 'economic and other controls'.³⁸ The formal transfer of power from Europeans to Africans had not seemed to subvert the fundamental dynamics of the colonial relationship; rather, the continued construction of foreign-designed banks, factories, and housing projects after colonialism suggested little more than a reconfiguration of power operating independently of direct rule and instead reliant upon nebulous, often intangible commercial and interpersonal networks with complicit assistance from local populations.³⁹ China's temporary exhibitions, by contrast, projected a kind of technical ambition that did not seem to imperil the political autonomy of potential partners.

At the same time, however, China's initial architectural foray into West Africa exposed the extent to which Chinese industry could not yet offer the depth or breadth of architectural or engineering expertise presented by its geopolitical rivals. Both Ghana and Guinea represented active, exploratory colonial sites for cutting-edge, sophisticated architectural design after World War II, particularly with respect to the production of climatically sensitive, technologically advanced architectural initiatives that are broadly defined as 'tropical Modernism'.⁴⁰ In Ghana, late colonial-era examples of tropical Modernism included the work of well-known British architects such as James Cubitt, Jane Drew, Maxwell Fry, Kenneth Scott and the firm Nickson & Borys (Fig. 6). Guinea represented an equally important, if less heralded, location for post-war French experimentation with prefabrication and climate control techniques. Notable late colonial-era works included a residential and commercial building completed in Conakry in 1952 by Marcel Lods and Rémi Le Caisne (with assistance from Vladimir Bodiansky) as well as Conakry's French Hotel, completed in 1953 by the team of Guy Lagneau, Michel Weill and Jean Dimitrijevic (architects collectively known as Atelier LWD), with engineering support and furniture design provided by Jean Prouvé and Charlotte Perriand respectively (Fig. 7).⁴¹ As purportedly neutral technologies signifying foreign expertise cloaked in localised sensitivity to climate, these projects possessed a sophisticated, self-assured worldliness to which Chinese architects would also aspire.

Both countries also remained sites for tropical architectural innovation after independence, with architects and engineers from both the capitalist and socialist worlds deployed to compete for the untested, ambiguous loyalties of both Nkrumah and Touré.⁴² Such an architecturally active and ideologically charged landscape enabled China, however, to reacquaint itself with cutting-edge building methods while quietly burnishing its own technocratic credibility. Nkrumah and Touré each embraced what they termed a diplomatic philosophy of 'positive neutrality' — an interpretation of non-alignment distinct from that promoted by Chinese officials, and one that enabled both leaders to seek developmental aid from a wide array of capitalist- and communist-aligned countries.⁴³ Notable architectural projects funded through these relationships included hotels, factories, and airports (Fig. 8). They also included large-scale infrastructural works such as the US-supported Volta River Project, a massive hydroelectric initiative that aimed to create the world's largest dam; Tema, a new town of 50,000 people

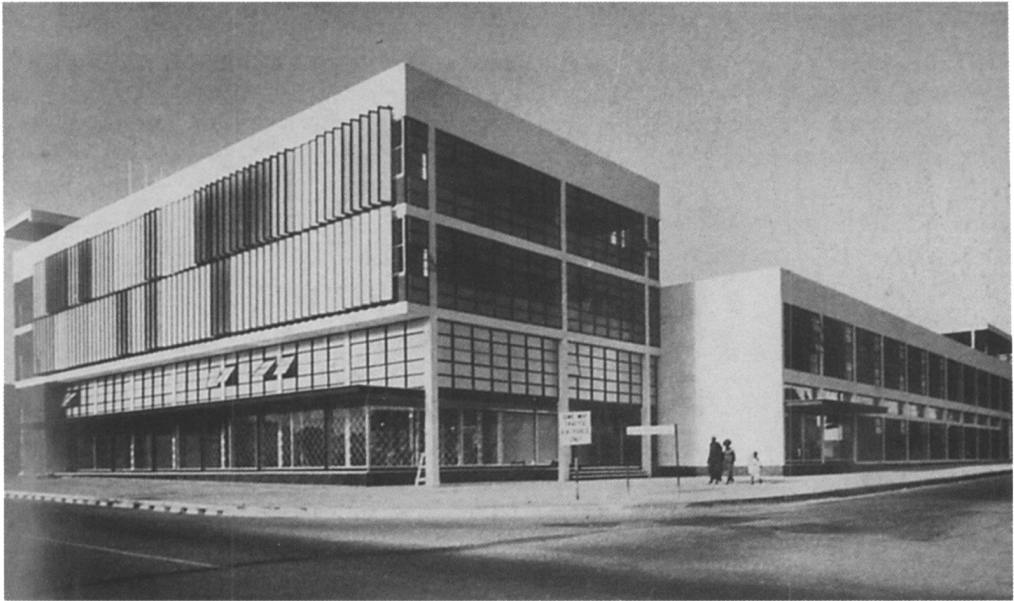


Fig. 6. *Bedford House, Accra* (photograph of 1956; Udo Kultermann, *New Architecture in Africa*, 1963)



Fig. 7. *Hôtel de France, Conakry* (photograph of 1953; Udo Kultermann, *New Architecture in Africa*, 1963)



Fig. 8. *Hotel Camayenne, Conakry (photograph of 1961; author's collection)*

designed by the Greek urbanist Constantinos Doxiadis; and Soviet schemes for several new residential areas in Accra and Tema to house 25,000 and 15,000 people respectively.⁴⁴ Many of these initiatives engaged with the same kind of 'scientific', purportedly neutral technocratic rationalism on display in well-known colonial-era tropically Modern projects, including low-cost, climatically sensitive *brise-soleil*, overhanging roof systems, and other sun-sheltering devices. Like their colonial antecedents, moreover, such devices also helped to obscure the divergent implementation systems underlying them and the differing epistemological authority they represented.⁴⁵

Ghanaian and Guinean officials used their amenability to such a wide range of foreign financial support, in addition to that offered by China, to reinforce their claims of diplomatic neutrality. Yet both Nkrumah and Touré remained wary of the neo-colonial risks posed by these partnerships. Architecturally, this paradox presented itself in each country's urgently professed desire to produce forms of 'Modern architecture' that were demonstrative not only of American and Western European technological prowess but also of their status as 'modern' independent African nations. The Soviet bloc, meanwhile, promised a certain degree of expertise, but such knowledge also came imbued with certain neo-colonial hierarchies. In fact, aid from either source comprised a broad and unpredictable spectrum of political interests, leaving African counterparts unsure as to the long-term reliability of these relationships.⁴⁶

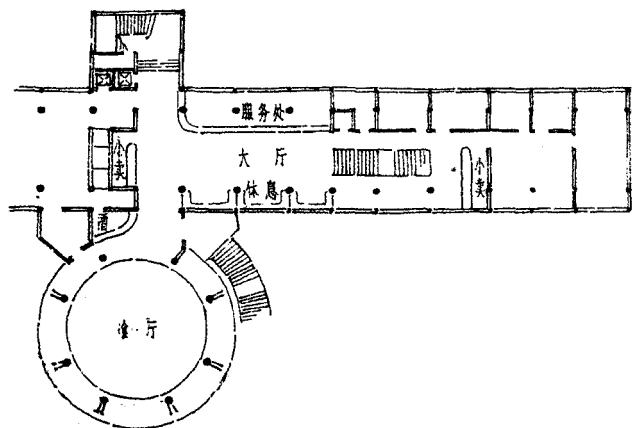


Fig. 9. *Hôtel de France*, Conakry (floor plan of 1962; Chen Deng'ao, 'Feizhou redai jianzhu jieshao', *Jianzhu Xuebao*, October 1962; courtesy of Jianzhu Xuebao)

In this respect, therefore, China remained an ideal partner — a liberated country possessing some degree of technical expertise in the process of modernisation without any overt indication of Western influence. Countering and mitigating China's technical inadequacies, however, required new, more speedy and sustainable methods of acquainting Chinese architects and engineers with new building environments, a process in which Ghana and Guinea both played important roles. Beginning in 1961, selected teams of Chinese architects from several of the country's most prominent state-run design institutes were sent to gather information about architectural conditions in West Africa. Initial results were published, in October 1962, in an article in the Chinese *Architectural Journal*, by Chen Deng'ao, an architect from the Beijing Design Institute.⁴⁷ Entitled 'Introduction to Africa's Tropical Architecture', the article enthusiastically introduced Chinese readers to the climatic particularities of working in Guinea, and noted vernacular African architecture's responsiveness to climate and the extent to which such sensitivities had informed recent buildings. Highlighted examples included Conakry's *Hôtel de France* — although the building's architects were not named or discussed (Fig. 9). Prominent sources in Chen's footnotes include a pamphlet entitled *Housing and Building in Hot-Humid and Hot-Dry Climates*, published by the United States National Research Council Building Research Advisory Board in 1953, and the 1956 book *Tropical Architecture in The Humid Zone*, published by the British architects Fry and Drew — although, again, neither the authors' names nor their national affiliations were mentioned. In fact, the only specific reference to the United States or Western Europe appears as a negative assessment of cheap American-made air conditioners regarding their excessive energy use and their inability to cool Guinean interiors sufficiently.⁴⁸

Chen's article was followed by two others on the architecture of Ghana and Guinea, published in May and August 1964 by Ren Guoyun of the Beijing Institute of Architectural Design and Wei Zhida of the East China Design Institute.⁴⁹ These introduced Chinese readers to a range of notable colonial and postcolonial projects from both countries, including a mixed-use building completed by French architects Lods and Le Caisne in Conakry, Atelier LWD's *Hôtel de France*, the main building at the University of Ghana at Legon completed in 1948, Bedford House in Accra designed by Kenneth

Scott Associates and constructed in 1956, and the Accra Central Library designed by Nickson and Borys and completed in 1956. Also discussed were several examples of industrial and residential construction built in Ghana's new town of Tema. Accompanying photographs, plans and diagrams elucidated architectural innovations and building techniques that were largely unknown to Chinese audiences at the time. Like Chen previously, the authors focused almost exclusively on foreign-built work in each country, but did not specify the dates of construction or the names and nationalities of the architects. Nor did they draw any distinctions between colonial- and postcolonial-era examples.

These publications, with their unprecedented focus on contemporaneous architectural production in Africa, have been broadly interpreted as enlightened attempts to celebrate Modern African architecture while avoiding the typical colonial-era portrayal of Africa as technologically backward and deficient.⁵⁰ Detached from each country's late-colonial and postcolonial pasts, however, the selected architectural examples evinced the kind of overbearing imperialistic influence that China's own ideologically driven designs ostensibly aimed to neutralise and replace. Indeed, China's first diplomats to West Africa noted the colonial attitudes that continued to haunt these locales and the extent to which colonial-era buildings helped in their perpetuation.⁵¹ However, the omission from either article of China's own designed and financed projects in the two countries, which by this point in time included a tobacco processing factory opened in Conakry in 1964 and plans for an integrated textile and knitwear factory of 1965 in Juapong, Ghana, serves to indicate some sensitivity over just how China's own influence within such complex geopolitical arenas might be understood and contextualised.⁵²

Such inconsistencies also illuminate the pragmatic and pressing objectives at work in China's architectural scholarship: the acquisition and dissemination of international technical knowledge (Fig. 10). Publically celebrated as locations for mutually beneficial, non-aligned economic engagement and technical cooperation, Ghana and Guinea offered Chinese architects and engineers a valuable means through which Modern and globally-circulated architectural ideas and techniques could be repackaged for an eager Chinese architectural community ostensibly as socialist-inspired and African methods.⁵³ Purged of any lingering imperial residue, the built works on display in both nations thus presented an opportunity for China to strengthen its own technical knowledge.

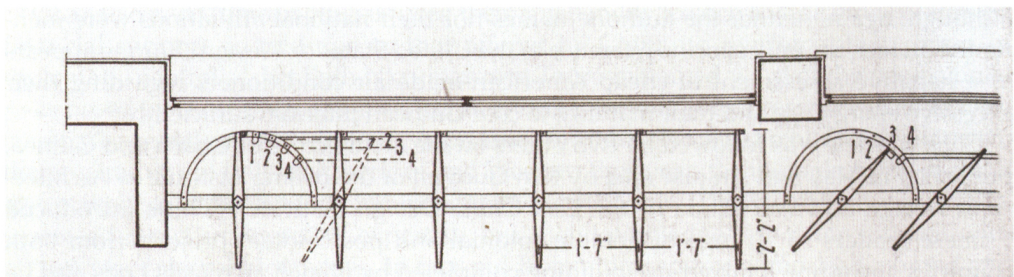


Fig. 10. *Rotating brise-soleil, residential and commercial building, Conakry (illustration of 1964; Jianzhu Xuebao, August 1964; courtesy of Jianzhu Xuebao)*

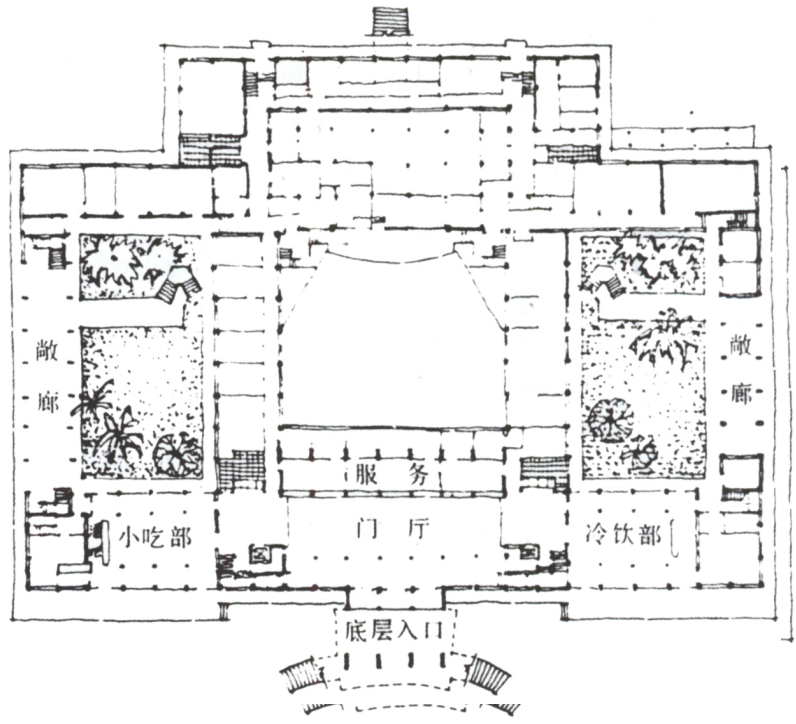
China already had experience in the gathering of design expertise from non-socialist sources for socialist repurposing. A significant proportion of the country's pre-revolutionary technology, in treaty-port cities such as Guangzhou, Shanghai and Tianjin, was in the form of foreign-designed equipment and infrastructure. Such technology was enthusiastically examined, too, by Soviet and Czechoslovak experts over the course of the 1950s.⁵⁴ China, however, was also involved in technical innovation itself, and Soviet advisors came to consider China's Hainan Island, located in the South China Sea, as a place where they could learn from China's new prowess in adapting automobile manufacturing techniques to products for export to warm climates.⁵⁵ In Ghana and Guinea, therefore, Chinese designers were given new sites where they could engage with comparable innovations, and new forms of region-specific experimentation that were politically and technologically unfeasible back home. Notions of architectural regionalism had become ideologically delicate topics in China by the early 1960s. Some work on climatically sensitive design had been undertaken in certain parts of the country in the early-to-mid 1950s, particularly the south-eastern province of Guangdong, but these efforts — and the architects behind them — were marginalised during the Great Leap Forward and, again, during the Cultural Revolution as bourgeois and unduly influenced by 'International Style' architecture.⁵⁶ Nevertheless the colonial legacy of tropical architecture, not only in Africa but also in British-controlled Hong Kong, had hitherto made the concept a difficult one for the CCP to embrace, since any acknowledged inspiration from Euro-American- or Soviet-derived sources was considered politically risky. It was the Chinese re-appropriation of late colonial-era tropical architecture in Ghana and Guinea, therefore, that offered a degree of discursive and formal flexibility in Africa unavailable to Chinese architects back in China.

It was this freedom which subsequently informed Chen's design of Guinea's National Assembly Building, completed in July 1967 in Conakry in partnership with Wang Rongshou, who was also from the Beijing Design Institute (Figs 11 and 12). The building, also known as the People's Palace, was initially part of a Soviet cooperative agreement with Guinea, but Chinese officials apparently wrested the project away from their estranged Soviet mentors in a pact signed with Touré in September 1961.⁵⁷ The building was positioned on the city's main avenue, which made it an unavoidable sight upon entry or exit from the city centre. Comprising three floors of more than 300 rooms, the complex was Guinea's largest political edifice to date, and the first political monument to be completed there since independence. Its interiors are organised around a 2,000-seat central assembly hall, and include a 300-person conference hall for meetings between smaller groups of heads of state and their respective retinues. On either side of the central assembly hall are two ancillary courtyards, with ranges of administrative offices organised around them. This core is distinguished from the building's other major spaces by its height as well as by a series of brick *brise-soleil* panels wrapping around its exterior. An additional band of vertical sun louvres extends around the building's first floor, shielding a series of hallways, together with two verandas and dining facilities, from the sun. In addition to these climatically beneficial components, the project also features several notable technological innovations, including multiple rooms equipped for simultaneous translation in eight different languages as well as central air conditioning.⁵⁸



Fig. 11 (above). *People's Palace, Conakry* (book cover; Chen Deng'ao, Redai jianzhu, 1989)

Fig. 12 (right). *People's Palace, Conakry* (floor plan of 1966; Chen Deng'ao, Redai jianzhu, 1989)



Like their American and Soviet-allied counterparts, Chen and Wang attempted to desensitise their imported architectural expertise by masking the scheme in a supposedly neutral and techno-scientific envelope. Yet, in some respects, the building did not diverge significantly from comparable projects of preceding times, including earlier socialist Chinese buildings with interior spaces organised in the same, rigidly symmetrical *Beaux Arts*-inspired manner, such as Beijing's Great Hall of the People completed in 1959. Unlike all these earlier projects, however, the National Assembly Building was infused with an ideological construct of non-aligned collaboration, and the empowerment of African labour, a construct, discussed in more detail shortly, that also distanced it from foreign-aid efforts that merely depended upon African labour.

China's dedication to collaboration, in this case with President Touré and the Guinean people, was also reflected in CCP promises that Guinean workers would be trained to operate any engineering equipment provided by China, and that Chinese technicians would only receive maintenance allowances while stationed in the country — an amount of money roughly equivalent to that received by Guinean workers on the job. This latter stipulation helped to distinguish China's efforts from those, say, of the Soviet Union, whose West African-based experts had at times received substantially more money than either their Chinese or African counterparts, an embarrassing disclosure that prompted an official review of Soviet personnel salary as early as January 1962.⁵⁹ China's avowed selflessness was further reinforced by, for example, official reports of Chinese personnel in Guinea making a 'habit of collecting old nails and small pieces of boards and corrugated roofing in their spare time and using them to build some auxiliary workshops, warehouses, storerooms for fertiliser and insecticide, and two bathrooms for Guinean workers'.⁶⁰ At the building's ceremonial opening, moreover, President Touré celebrated the event by paying tribute to the

selfless and worthy behaviour of the Chinese representatives and experts who have always enjoyed the high respect and admiration of our people, our working class in particular. We salute the political, economic and moral significance of this disinterested aid given us by the People's Republic of China.⁶¹

As an index of China's commitment to Guinea, and as an instrument of political performance, however, the People's Palace was anything but disinterested architecture. The emphasis placed on the localised and uniquely socialist collaborative process, which was rooted in the creative industriousness of its Chinese designers and contractors, was itself a political statement, as was the declared diligence of the Guinean labourers, and the cooperative and revolutionary spirit that seemed to bind them both together.⁶² Despite the official emphasis on the collective nature of the building's making, however, the project's function as a symbol of modern Guinea represented a significant shift in the nature and process of Chinese international architectural design. This, moreover, exposed growing contradictions in China's purportedly flexible and non-aligned approach. For example, as part of its typical commodity exchange arrangement, China exported significant amounts of its own building materials to Guinea, one apocryphal rumour claiming that even the sand in the cement was Chinese.⁶³ There were other problems too. Although initial agreements were designed to enable both China and any potential partner a certain degree of flexibility, Touré himself, in October 1963,

acknowledged that Guinea had established a state-run trade system in large part because China 'would only deal with state-owned institutions'.⁶⁴ Such economic accommodations also extended into the architectural design process. Just as London and Paris had served as the centres of British and French imperial architectural knowledge regarding Africa, Beijing now began to serve a similar function.⁶⁵ By 1965, and notwithstanding a three-month visit to Conakry by a group of Chinese architects and engineers, all of the complex's design work was actually being conducted in Beijing. Moreover, after construction eventually began in January 1966, language obstacles made Chinese oversight essential, and so teams of African workers laboured under the rotating supervision of Chinese engineers sent to the country on limited tours of duty.

Such comprehensive oversight had its benefits, since it resulted in a building that could stand alongside either its socialist or capitalist-funded counterparts. Nkrumah found the complex 'beautiful' and reminiscent of public structures in Ghana, while another African leader extolled it as the 'most magnificent edifice south of the Sahara'.⁶⁶ Taking note of this African context was not at all unreasonable. Faced with the unprecedented challenges of delivering an expression of Guinean modernity, the Chinese architects working on the project had gone some way to take this into account. They had, however, little choice but to operate with a degree of interpretive license concerning Guinean architectural culture, and this evoked the same kind of well-intentioned patronisation on display in the work of late colonial-era foreign architects such as Drew and Fry, who had envisaged genuine social and political transformative potential in their own, contextualised interpretations of Modern Ghanaian architecture for use in schools and other public edifices.⁶⁷ Chen himself later spoke of his project as a response to Guinean vernacular architecture's sensitivities to airflow and the climatic realities of the place that might, in turn, provide Guinea with the kinds of technological advancements it might not have achieved on its own.⁶⁸

Chen's defining role at a major moment in modern Guinean history — the realisation of the country's first postcolonial political edifice — signalled the ever-growing influence of Chinese involvement in West African economic and political development. Equally significantly, however, it also exposed the degree to which the Chinese study of Modern architecture in West Africa was occurring without any mutual West African engagement with modern China, and Chinese officials seemed to recognise the risks of such a situation. As early as 1961, for example, the country had begun to offer scholarships to African students, and 225 students from Africa were enrolled in Beijing's Institute of Foreign Languages alone. In 1962, however, thirty Cameroonian students were expelled from the school, allegedly for reacting openly to racial discrimination, and by 1963, most of China's African exchange students had decided to leave the country.⁶⁹ It is unclear how many African students travelled to China to study architecture over this period of time, and the numbers may have, in fact, been negligible. The architecture department at Qinghua University, home to China's most prestigious programme, did not admit any African exchange students until 1985.⁷⁰

The privileging of China's technological superiority now taking place in Guinea opened space, subsequently, for a new and even more aspirant form of Chinese architectural exportation abroad. By 1967 it was estimated that some 3,000 Chinese technicians were living in Guinea alone; Chinese-funded projects included the Kinkon hydroelectric

power station, a tobacco factory, a groundnut oil factory, a tea processing plantation and factory, and a cement manufacturing plant.⁷¹ Such praxis remained grounded in claims of non-aligned empathy, but it also expressed China's wish to project the kind of technocratic proficiency considered emblematic of a world power. As an emblem of benevolent Chinese paternalism in West Africa, Guinea's People Palace also portended the emerging risks posed by China's increasing efforts to interpret and understand another country's architectural identity without any substantial and reciprocal engagement with China — the same epistemological imbalance evident in much of West Africa's colonial-era and post-colonial, Cold War-driven construction.

RECONFIGURATION AND REFORM, 1967–92

It was not until 1989 that China would launch its next significant architectural commission in West Africa. This project — the Chinese-designed National Theatre in Accra — registered the Chinese architect's transformation from a cooperative technocrat participating in West Africa's economic development to a far more subjective interpreter of West African cultural production (Figs 13 and 14). This shift was precipitated by a series of dramatic changes in the tenor and scope of China's political and economic agenda both at home and abroad.

Over the course of the late 1960s and early 1970s, China's relations with both Guinea and Ghana had been disturbed by several unforeseen events. In particular, on 24 February 1966, President Nkrumah of Ghana was deposed in a military coup.⁷² At this moment, China had 1,000 tons of material and equipment ready in Accra for further factory construction, with approximately an additional 42 million dollars-worth of Chinese aid promised. Nevertheless, China was asked to withdraw the one hundred or so of its technicians working in Ghana, and its embassy staff in Ghana was cut to eighteen. It subsequently closed its embassy in Accra on 20 October 1966, which led to a complete breakdown in relations between the two countries.

The loss of Nkrumah as an ally, coupled with the emergence of new strategic socialist alliances in southern and eastern Africa, prompted Chinese officials to reassess their country's economic and political objectives in the continent. China would, subsequently, go on to complete a memorial, in Conakry, to those Guinean soldiers killed while defending the country during an aborted coup in 1972, and Guinean officials continued to praise projects completed by the PRC as well-planned and executed compared to those of the Soviet Union and other socialist-bloc countries, which were described as ill-planned and badly executed.⁷³ With the Soviet Union's naval expansion into southern and eastern Africa, however, Chinese officials began to question the value of their financial commitments to West Africa.⁷⁴ A further factor affecting this reappraisal was the Cultural Revolution, which severely damaged communist China's reputation abroad for efficient and reliable administration.⁷⁵ Yet another was that, on 25 October 1971, the PRC was finally recognised by the United Nations, thus marking the end of an era of dogged geopolitical mediation for political legitimacy. Twenty-seven African nations, including Ghana and Guinea, voted in support of the measure, and this was followed by the normalisation of China's trade relations with Japan in September 1972, and with the United States in December 1978. These two events, however, seemed to contradict



Fig. 13. National Theatre, Accra (photograph of 2014; author's collection)

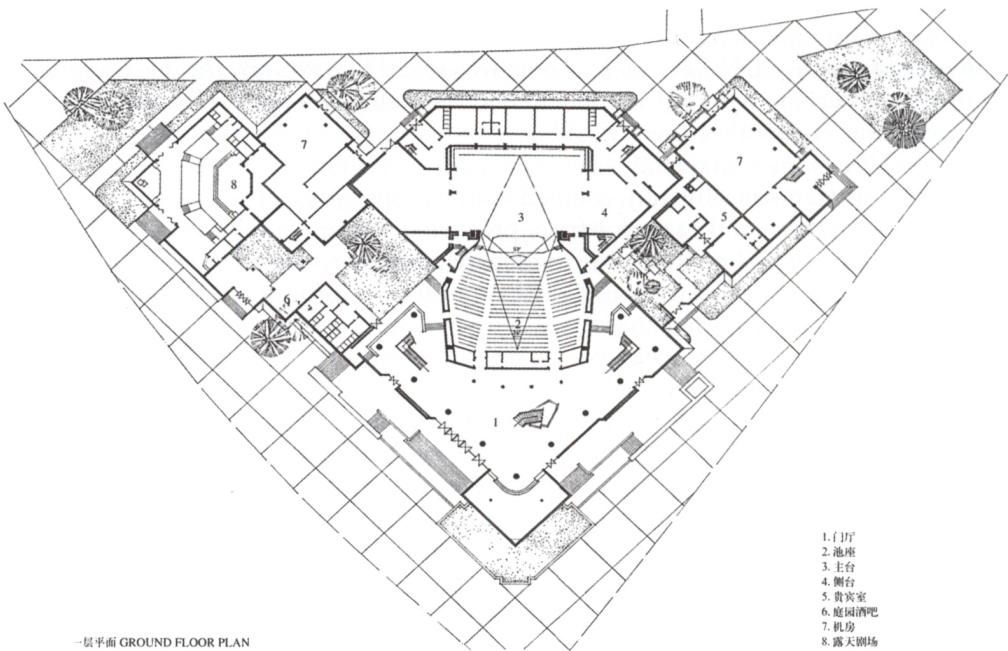


Fig. 14. National Theatre, Accra (floor plan of 1989; Zhongguo baiming yiji zhuce jianzhushi zuopin xuan, 1998)

the ideological basis upon which China's West African strategy had been established, and caused vexation to socialist-inclined allies such as Touré.⁷⁶

As for China's architectural priorities, these had shifted over the course of the 1970s, in accordance with the country's economic liberalisation, from West Africa to Japan, Europe and the United States. Between 1976 and 1982, China's aid pledges to the African continent fell from 100.9 million to just 13.8 million US dollars.⁷⁷ China continued to support architectural and engineering initiatives in Africa and insisted upon its own status as a 'Third World' country.⁷⁸ However, increasingly confident self-promotions of China's technological superiority vis-à-vis its African partners — even if they were sometimes recognised as being rather misleading — registered a new geopolitical perspective evocative of colonial-era rhetoric used to rationalise Europe's civilising mission to Africa decades prior. 'Our leaders realised that China was rather backward in railway construction', one senior Chinese official was quoted as declaring following the completion of the China-engineered and funded Tanzania-Zambia railway in 1975, 'but we should help countries which are more backward — this is our internationalist duty'.⁷⁹ In fact, economic data such as *per capita* income from the period in question continued to suggest that China remained on a par with, if not poorer than, several of the countries with which it was architecturally engaged.

The building of Ghana's National Theatre followed the twenty-fifth anniversary, on 1 July 1985, of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Ghana. The occasion saw a series of new cooperative agreements as well as plans to replace the city's pre-existing playhouse with a national arts and theatre complex that was to be Chinese-designed, financed and constructed.⁸⁰ Plans were slow to materialise, however, and three years later, in 1988, a team of Chinese experts led by Chen Yiming of the Central Conservatory of Music and Professor Zhang Shiqun of the Central Academy of Fine Arts eventually arrived in Accra to study the proposal.⁸¹ A cultural pact was subsequently signed between the two countries that July.⁸²

Complications, however, were soon to follow. In January 1989, a series of violent clashes between African and Chinese students in Nanjing quickly spread to other cities in China.⁸³ At the time, there were thirty-four Ghanaian students studying there and at least one of them was arrested in what escalated into ten days of protests and racial tension.⁸⁴ The episode, though, prompted Justice D. F. Annan, a member of the PNDC (Provisional National Defence Council), to publically reaffirm Ghana's confidence in China as a leading 'Third World' country.⁸⁵ Plans for the theatre were quickly completed by the Hangzhou Design Institute and submitted that February to the Ghanaian embassy in Beijing. Soon after, following the violent suppression of nationwide public protests, beginning 4 June, against the growing inequities taking place in reform-era China, a formal National Theatre agreement was finally signed in July, in recognition of Ghana's unwavering support for China during this time of crisis, and at last enabling the building's realisation.⁸⁶

The initial design for the National Theatre, completed previously in February by chief architect Cheng Taining of the Hangzhou Design Institute, consisted of three, triangular wedges of theatre and studio space positioned atop a large podium (Fig. 15). This scheme, however, was to be substantially revised, following the Ghanaian government's rejection of its overly conservative appearance, and Cheng subsequently committed

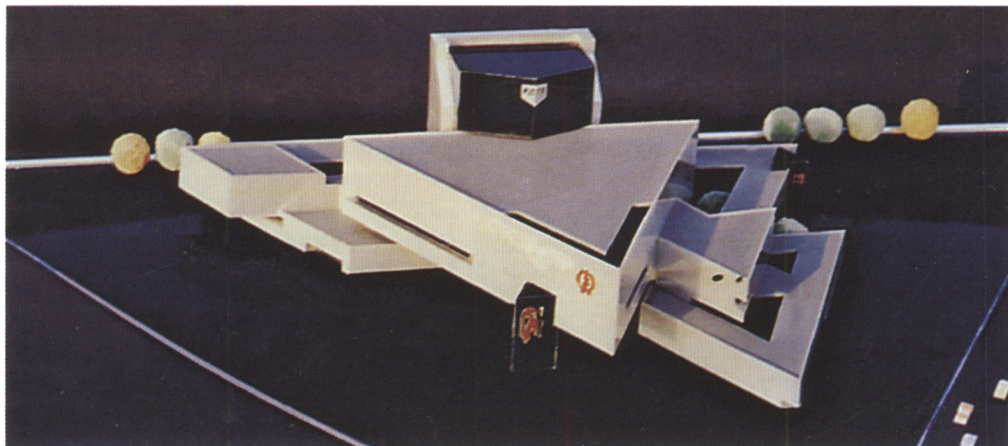


Fig. 15. *Preliminary scheme for the National Theatre, Accra (photograph of 1989; Dangdai Zhongguo jianzhushi congshu bianweihui: Cheng Taining, 1997)*

himself instead to translating the 'exaggerated, mystical, and uninhibited qualities of African art' into architectural form, resulting in the curved contours of the final scheme.⁸⁷ Although also intended as a new and more liberated form of Modern architectural expression, forged through Chinese and Ghanaian cooperation, Cheng's building instead offered an architectural interpretation of 'African-ness' based on a set of tired stereotypes that merely exoticised African cultural expression.

Like Guinea's People's Palace, the building was designed to index the dawning of some new and genuinely modern era in Ghanaian architecture' distinct from that of the country's previous and pseudo-modern colonial past. As the main new centre for the nation's theatre, dance and performance arts, the building accommodates a 1,500-seat theatre and two secondary triangular masses providing additional rehearsal studios. Around these spaces are located practice, dressing and make-up rooms as well as supporting office and circulation space. The complex also included a public square and fountain, and a Chinese garden discreetly wedged into a corner next to a VIP room intended for political and cultural emissaries. The mahogany-stained interiors, decorated with examples of contemporary African art, provide ample space for various other public activities, including book launches, commercial promotions and fashion shows. Externally, the complex's hulking, white-tiled mass juts out over a granite-faced plinth onto one of Accra's busiest intersections, projecting a formal dynamism that Cheng believed would embody the cultural activities supported by the building while dramatically distinguishing itself from any of Accra's Cold War-era constructions. To accommodate the massive size of this all-purpose cultural centre, the city's pre-existing drama studio, an open-air amphitheatre built in 1961 under the Nkrumah regime (with American funding from the Sloan, Ford, and Rockefeller Foundations) was demolished — despite its political and cultural significance as the location of many of the country's first decolonised theatre, musical, and dance productions. The construction of a replica of this original theatre, by Chinese engineers on the University of Ghana's campus to

the north of the city, signified Ghana's acquiescence to China's narrative of non-alignment.

Like the earlier Chinese work in Guinea, however, Ghana's National Theatre did little to engage with the specific purposes for which it was intended. For example, the theatre itself did not fully cater for the spatial requirements of Ghanaian dance, which is often performed in the round. Instead, its layout, with a proscenium arch and an apron-shaped auditorium, is in keeping with a classical Chinese or European theatre. Cheng himself never travelled to Africa as part of the National Theatre's design or construction process and so never engaged with Ghanaian culture at first hand. He simply relied on a small team of engineers who spent time examining site conditions in Accra before reporting back to Hangzhou.⁸⁸

The new building's construction process also illuminates the extent to which hierarchies in China's international architectural production had become fraught with cross-cultural complexities as they worked to accommodate their own sets of architectural and engineering practices within a foreign context. As previously, China sought to distinguish its international influence from any other international aid provider by emphasising the equitable cooperative nature of the construction process itself. The building's realisation, which was launched in June 1990, was spearheaded by a Chinese construction firm, COMPLANT (China Complete Plant Import & Export Corporation).⁸⁹ The initial workforce of 520, comprising 400 Ghanaians and 120 Chinese, shifted over time to 470 Ghanaian labourers under the supervision of 83 Chinese foremen.⁹⁰ A range of Chinese procedures and techniques were also adopted in an effort to realise the project quickly and efficiently. The Chinese foremen were assigned to the site for spells of time ranging from six months to one year, after which they were sent either to another project in a different country or back to China. They directed teams of Ghanaian labourers in carefully regulated work shifts operating seven days a week, and resided in makeshift accommodation constructed across the street from the construction site, where daily whistles registered the workday's start and end as well as lunch breaks. Chinese leaders felt these frameworks would help structure foreign labour in productive ways, suggesting the possibility of broader reconfiguration within Ghanaian society through Chinese cooperation. In keeping with China's Maoist-era system of commodity exchange, almost all the building's materials, including cement, marble, granite, wood, and tile facing, originated from China.

Following its completion on 20 December 1992, the theatre was trumpeted as marking the first national, 'ultra-Modern' theatre of its kind in all of West Africa, with an 'imposing and magnificent' form that would serve as 'a lasting monument of Ghana/China friendship and solidarity'.⁹¹ The opening festivities included the launching of a Chinese art exhibition and a joint performance by the Abibigroma Dance Ensemble, the National Symphony Orchestra, and the Pan African Orchestra. The National Theatre's opening also signalled the launch of a nationwide theatre construction initiative, the aims and objectives of which were to be centred on the promotion and development of the performing arts. Notably, however, the building's opening ceremony did not feature China's ambassador to Ghana, but instead included Mr Song Luyan, China's Vice Minister for Machine Building and Electronics Industry, who symbolically handed over the theatre's

keys. The gesture by China reveals the larger industrial implications at work through the project.

The theatre's conception, design, and construction also spanned a period of growing public debate in Ghana over the possibility of Africa's re-colonisation and the extent to which Ghanaian architecture should more accurately reflect the nation's culture.⁹² This is seen, for example, in a speech delivered in June 1986 by Dr Kofi Sam, Secretary for Works and Housing, urging the country's civil engineers to design buildings that 'reflected reality' and took into consideration local conditions and indigenous raw materials.⁹³ The risks posed by Africa's 'economic colonialism' were also highlighted in an article in the *Ghanaian Times*, while another urged Africa to bolster its 'self-reliance' and dismantle all colonial structures still present in many of its country's societies, and to work toward restoring 'cultural identity' and respecting 'cultural values' by moving away from popular forms of cultural expression such as drumming and dancing.⁹⁴ In fact, a cultural awareness drive was subsequently launched in August 1989 in an attempt to 'reawaken the cultural consciousness of the Ghanaian people' and 'resuscitate and revive one's way of life'.⁹⁵ Other newspaper editorials urged Africa's resistance to foreign developmental models and the importation of technological hardware.⁹⁶

Oddly, the National Theatre project evaded all such public criticism. Its omission from these public debates implies a lingering exceptionalism afforded to China's non-aligned patronage even while exposing the ideological inconsistencies at work in Ghana's drive toward self-modernisation. It may well be, too, that the Cheng's justification of his building's design through well-worn clichés concerning Africa's forms of cultural expression satisfied Ghana's leaders, but such rationales also revealed Cheng's, and by extension the Chinese government's, physical and epistemological distance from Ghanaian reality. Nevertheless, Ghanaian officials did not protest about, or even criticise, China's subjective reappraisal of their country's architectural history and culture. Following the National Theatre's completion, in fact, Ghanaian architect and politician Don Arthur of the PNDC Secretariat thanked China's engineers for inculcating a 'Chinese work culture' in those Ghanaians who assisted in the construction.⁹⁷ This was despite the fact that few Chinese foremen could speak English upon their arrival in Accra, leaving both them and Ghanaian workers with little choice but to rely on a system of drawn instructions, coupled with miming, to convey what was required.⁹⁸ Chinese supervisors would eventually learn to communicate in English, but few stayed in Ghana long enough to capitalise upon this. Those Ghanaian workers deemed especially diligent and dedicated were subsequently selected by their Chinese foremen to become members of its management and maintenance crew, but they still lacked fundamental knowledge about the building's construction. Thus, when an earthquake damaged the theatre in 2005, thirteen years after its completion, it was Chinese engineers who undertook the repairs rather than entrusting the work to a local firm. Ghanaian architects had no choice but to acquiesce since all of the documentation of building's construction was written in Chinese.⁹⁹

Cheng's building remains a hub of cultural activity in Accra. Although few residents consider it to be emblematic of any kind of Modern African architecture, it has still been described as 'iconic' and is understood among members of Ghana's architectural and

political elite to be a Chinese-designed project that has provided a valuable service to the local community.¹⁰⁰ Few residents, however, are aware of the problematic intent behind its expressive, curvilinear forms or the procedural imbalances at the heart of its making, indicating the subtle but subversive impact China's asynchronous practices have had upon modern Ghanaian architectural expression and identity.

CONCLUSION

In 1971, an exiled Kwame Nkrumah wrote from Guinea that the

neo-colonialism of today represents imperialism in its final and perhaps most dangerous stage [...]. The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside. More often, however, neo-colonialist control is exercised through economic or monetary means. The neo-colonial State may be obliged to take the manufactured products of the imperialist power to the exclusion of competing products from elsewhere.¹⁰¹

Chinese-designed and constructed architectural and engineering projects in West Africa may not in themselves evince some neo-colonial or imperialistic impulse. Nevertheless, they represent a particular strain of Modern architectural production, dependent upon a distinct set of economic and ideological determinants, that remain imbued with the same kinds of coercive disparities and imbalances that were endemic to the Modernist project. In this respect, the history of Chinese architecture in Ghana and Guinea illuminates a new, transformative vector in global architectural culture: one that eschews traditional, Euro-American architectural knowledge and, in so doing, problematises the stubborn notions of centre and periphery that persist in our framing and understanding of Modern architecture's diffusion around the post-war world. It was the exchange of non-aligned knowledge and technology initially offered China an important purchase from which it could participate both in the global economy and in international architectural discourse. It was architecture's representational qualities and its methods of production that allowed China to transmute its diplomatic and economic exchanges into real projects that demonstrated idealistic objectives, while enhancing and internationalising China's political and economic influence.

Chinese officials still tout their country's involvement in nations such as Ghana and Guinea as providing obvious benefits to the African countries but giving less tangible advantages to China. In fact, however, China's benefits have always been very tangible, if not always immediately legible to international audiences. Over time, and in large part accelerated by China's own economic liberalisation, its relationship with allies such as Ghana and Guinea has led to a gradual re-centring of global economic and architectural activity toward China. Thus China's reservoir of expertise concerning African architectural design and procedure can be regarded as constituting a Sinocentric, state-subsidised, epistemological system through which technological expertise, political influence and economic leverage have been channelled for measurable diplomatic gain.

Such changes, moreover, have required a degree of political economic authority which Chinese officials and architects would do well to acknowledge. China still maintains its



Fig. 16. *African Union Headquarters, Addis Ababa (photograph of 2011; Associated Press)*

desire to produce non-ideological infrastructure for allies in need, even though the scale and scope of Chinese production in Africa seems largely antithetical to the kind of sustained architectural collaboration the party had originally promoted. China's increasingly preeminent role, not merely in the construction of physical infrastructure in Africa but in the fabrication of many of the continent's political and cultural edifices, consistently denies African designers critical opportunities to craft their own contemporary idiom, although these matters are now becoming more discussed. The new African Union Headquarters, arguably the most significant state- and Chinese-sponsored project undertaken in recent years, was completed in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 2011, with financial support from the Chinese Ministry of Construction (Fig. 16). Designed by the Architectural Design and Research Institute of Tongji University in Shanghai and constructed by the China State Construction Engineering Corporation, the 200-million-dollar complex was marketed as 'China's gift to Africa' and was, again, built almost entirely of Chinese materials. For all the professed apolitical nature of Chinese intervention, however, this project has — at last — sparked politicised debate concerning China's role in designing such a building, which is the preeminent symbol of pan-African relations.¹⁰² Thus, while the project's supporters continue to see the economic benefits of China's charitable benevolence, critics have voiced their discomfort over the risks

China's patronage poses to Africa's architectural self-determination, and what they read to be a message of African submissiveness embodied by the building.

The ballooning size and scope of China's state-run design institutes and construction firms — seven of the world's twenty-five largest construction contractors, including four of the top six, are based in China — constitute an increasing degree of political economic influence that challenges the social and cultural contexts within which they operate.¹⁰³ The constancy of China's physical presence in Africa has played a leading role in shaping African modernity, while the influence it currently enables has effectively relegated Africa to a subaltern position, generating new inequities in post-colonial-era African architectural development that need to be acknowledged.

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2 Lu Dingyi, 'Duiyu zhan hou guoji xingshi zhong ji ge jiben wenti de jieshi', *Renmin Ribao*, 14 January 1947, p. 1.

3 Zhou Enlai, *China and the Asian-African Conference (Documents)* (Beijing, 1955), p. 11.

4 See Lucia Allais, 'Integrities: The Salvage of Abu Simbel', *Grey Room*, 50 (Winter 2013), pp. 6–45; Viviana D'Auria, 'From Tropical Transitions to Ekistic Experimentation: Doxiadis Associates in Tema, Ghana', *Positions: On Modern Architecture and Urbanism/Histories and Theories*, 1 (2010), pp. 40–63; Kim De Raedt, 'Between "true believers" and operational experts: UNESCO architects and school building in post-colonial Africa', *The Journal of Architecture*, 19 (2014), pp. 19–42.

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11 For example, Rhodri Windsor Liscombe has described Jane Drew and Maxwell Fry's collaborative research and design work in late-imperial Ghana as possessing 'an aesthetic and ideological distance'; see Liscombe, 'Modernism in Late Imperial British West Africa: The Work of Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, 1946–56', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 65 (June 2006), pp. 188–215 (p. 193).

12 See Robert A. Scalapino, 'The Sino-Soviet Conflict in Perspective', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 351 (January 1964), pp. 1–14.

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17 Zhou, *Afro-Asian Solidarity Against Imperialism*, p. 153.

18 Richard Anderson, 'USA/USSR: Architecture and War', *Grey Room*, 34 (Winter 2009), pp. 80–103; Tom Avermaete, "'Neues Bauen in Afrika': displaying East and West German architecture during the Cold War', *The Journal of Architecture*, 17, no. 3 (2012), pp. 387–404. China's industrial fairs were organised by Chinese Friendship Associations and advertised both as celebrations of Chinese industry as well as transnational exercises in international cooperation; see 'Feizhou pengyou huanhu Zhongguo de chengjiu – ji wo guo zai Kenakeli juban de jingji jianshe chengjiu zhanlanhui', *Renmin Ribao*, 2 March 1961, p. 5; 'China Exhibits Abroad', *China Reconstructs*, 10 (June 1961), p. 30.

19 'Wo jingji jianshe chengjiu zhanlanhui zai Jiana shoudu kaimu: binzu qianguo zhanlanhui de juxing jiang zengjin liang guo renmin de liaojie he youyi', *Renmin Ribao*, 13 August 1961, p. 3.

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22 See George T. Yu, 'Africa in Chinese Foreign Policy', *Asian Survey*, 28, no. 8 (1988), pp. 849–62.

23 Philip Snow, 'China and Africa: Consensus and Camouflage', in *Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice*, ed. Thomas W. Robinson and David Shambaugh (Oxford, 1994), p. 285. In 1957, for example, Mao delivered a famous speech in which he declared: 'I'm not afraid of nuclear war. There are 2.7 billion people in the world; it doesn't matter if some are killed. China has a population of 600 million; even if half of them are killed, there are still 300 million people left. I'm not afraid of anyone'. Long rumored to exist, but never officially acknowledged, a televised recording of the speech was publically aired in China for the first time in February 2013; see 'Mao's 'Nuclear Mass Extinction Speech' Aired on Chinese TV', *Epoch Times*, 5 March 2013, <http://www.theepochtimes.com/n3/4758-maos-nuclear-mass-extinction-speech-aired-on-chinese-tv> (accessed 15 August 2014)

24 For example, on September 15 1960, and just prior to the ceremony in which Huang Hua, China's first ambassador to Ghana, was expected to present his credentials to President Nkrumah, Huang noticed that the flag of the Republic of Taiwan, rather than the People's Republic of China, was hanging at the president's compound. The Foreign Minister apologised, and the flag was replaced; see Huang Hua, *Xinli yu Jianwen: Huang Hua huiyi lu* (Beijing, 2007), p. 117.

25 Jersild, *The Sino-Soviet Alliance*, pp. 27–81, 88–97.

26 Here, I am borrowing the term 'design intelligence' from Michael Speaks, who has used it to categorise what he sees as a necessary shift in the nature of contemporary architectural discourse after 11 September 2001; see Speaks, 'Design Intelligence Part 1: Introduction', *A+U*, 12 (2002), pp. 10–18.

27 Peter G. Rowe and Seng Kuan, *Architectural Encounters with Essence and Form in Modern China* (Cambridge, MA, 2002), p. 92.

28 In 1959–61, during a period of severe domestic famine, China began to channel thousands of tons of food to African states such as Guinea and Sudan. Snow, 'China and Africa: Consensus and Camouflage', p. 288; Elliot J. Berg, 'Socialism and Economic Development in Tropical Africa', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 78, no. 4 (1964), p. 559.

29 'China Exhibits Abroad', *China Reconstructs*, 10, no. 2 (1961), pp. 30–31 (p. 31).

- 30 'Exhibition Hall — China's gift to Ghana', *Ghana Today*, 5, no. 25 (1962), p. 11.
- 31 See Dorothy Solinger, *Chinese Business Under Socialism: the Politics of Domestic Commerce, 1949–80* (Berkeley, 1984), p. 21.
- 32 Bruce D. Larkin, *China and Africa, 1949–1970: The Foreign Policy of the People's Republic of China* (Berkeley, 1971), pp. 93–108.
- 33 Ladipo Adamolekun, *Sékou Touré's Guinea* (London, 1976), p. 96.
- 34 The World Bank, <http://www.worldbank.org/> (accessed 10 July 2014).
- 35 Guinea was the only former French colony to reject continued association with its metropole, a bold action rewarded by the immediate withdrawal of all 3000 of France's colonial officials from the country and the destruction of much of the colonial-era physical infrastructure and equipment, including telephone lines, railroad tracks, maps, files, medical supplies, police uniforms, even the plates and cutlery in the Presidential Palace. Despite a population of 2.6 million and a geographical expanse of 160,000 square miles, Guinea was left with only fifteen secondary schools, no tertiary institutions, no banking institutions, no currency, and an illiteracy rate of 95 percent; see Peter Schwab, *Designing West Africa: Prelude to 21st-Century Calamity* (New York, 2004), p. 119. Ghana's transition to independence, by contrast, was cushioned by economic reserves amounting to over half a billion dollars (derived in large part from the country's massive cocoa and gold exports). With its relations with Great Britain left largely intact, the country could rely on an ambitious, colonial-era development plan that included the Volta Dam project, a massive energy generation scheme initially imagined within a 1952 British White Paper and anticipated to create the world's largest manmade reservoir. See W. Scott Thompson, *Ghana's Foreign Policy, 1957–1966: Diplomacy, Ideology, and the New State* (Princeton, NJ, 1969), p. xvii.
- 36 George T. Yu, 'China and the Third World', *Asian Survey* 17, no. 11 (1977), pp. 1036–48.
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- 40 See Hannah Le Roux, 'The networks of tropical architecture', *Journal of Architecture*, 8, no. 3 (2003), pp. 337–54; Liscombe, 'Modernism', pp. 188–215; Lilian Chee and Jiat-Hwee Chang, 'Introduction: "Tropicality-in-motion": Situating tropical architecture', *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 32 (2011), pp. 277–82.
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- 44 D'Auria, 'From Tropical Transitions', pp. 40–63; Lukasz Stanek, 'Architects from Socialist Countries in Ghana (1957–1967): Modern Architecture and Mondialisation', forthcoming in *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* (December 2015).
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- 70 *Jiangren yingguo*, ed. Qinghua daxue jianzhu xueyuan (Beijing, 2006), p. 307.
- 71 Adamolekun, *Sékou Touré's Guinea*, p. 71. Also, *Xinhua News Agency*, 1 February 1967. In 1973, China's outstanding loans to Guinea stood at an estimated \$55 million; see Ogunsanwo, *China's Policy in Africa, 1958–71*, p. 214.
- 72 Schwab, *Designing West Africa: Prelude to 21st-Century Calamity*, p. 100. Although an overreliance upon Communist bloc aid was given as the army's rationale for taking action, many suspected CIA involvement in the plot. Nkrumah, who was en route to Beijing when the coup occurred, was eventually flown to Conakry via Moscow, where Touré named him co-president of the country. There, Nkrumah lamented his political fate, writing several books on his experience of leading Ghana and attempting to establish a freedom fighter headquarters in Guinea based upon a model he had seen in China when visiting Mao. He eventually died of prostate cancer in Romania in 1972. See Nkrumah and Milne, *Kwame Nkrumah: The Conakry Years*, p. 9.
- 73 Adamolekun, *Sékou Touré's Guinea*, p. 200, n. 24.
- 74 An editorial published in *Renmin Ribao* in 1978, for example, suggested how anxious the Chinese were to thwart Soviet aggression, declaring that 'the monstrous claws of the Soviet Union must be chopped off wherever they stretch'. *Renmin Ribao*, 19 September 1978, cited in Snow, 'China and Africa', p. 293.
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- 78 In a speech delivered on 10 April 1974 to a special session of the United Nations General Assembly, Deng Xiaoping declared that 'China belongs to the Third World [...]. China is not a superpower, nor will she ever seek to be one. What is a superpower? A superpower is an imperialist country which everywhere subjects other countries to its aggression, interference, control, subversion or plunder and strives for world hegemony [...]. If one day China should change her colour and turn into a superpower, if she too should play the tyrant in the world, and everywhere subject others to her bullying, aggression and exploitation, the people of the world should identify her as social-imperialism, expose it, oppose it and work together with the Chinese people to overthrow it'; see www.marxists.org/reference/archive/deng-xiaoping/1974/04/10.htm (accessed on 13 January 2015)
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- 100 Lloyd G. Adu Amoah, 'China, architecture, and Ghana's spaces: Concrete signs of a soft Chinese imperium?', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, pre-published 29 August 2014 www.jas.sagepub.com (accessed on 15 January 2015); author's interviews with Nat Amartefio, 27 May 2014, and Stella N. D. Arthiabah, 28 May 2014.
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