

“GREAT VLADIVOSTOK”: PROCESS AND RESULTS

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Abstract. The “Great Vladivostok” project of the Khrushchev period is relatively little known in the history of the USSR due to political reasons. It was not only a part of Khrushchev’s great construction reform in the country but also an attempt to consolidate the influence of the Soviet Union in Eastern Asia, create a new type of port, and settle the territory of the south of the Far East with immigrants from the western part of the country. In addition, the project had several features that both Soviet and foreign scholars ignored.

The authors use archival materials, oral history, and the works of researchers, including unpublished ones, in this article.

The work aims to describe the realisation of the project, and its main ideas, to analyse its successes and failures.

Keywords: Vladivostok, Far East, USSR, history, urbanisation, city.

INTRODUCTION

Vladivostok is the capital of the modern Russian Primorye region. It is a far post of Russia in East Asia. This city was established in 1860, recognised as a city and seaport in 1880, and became the region’s main city in 1888. However, until the 1960s (the start of the project “Great Vladivostok”) it was a great village and did not have an urban structure, cultural life or factories. But Soviet leader N.S. Khrushchev understood the importance of Vladivostok and wanted to create this city as one of the principal agglomerations in the Asian Pacific. Therefore, he started the project “Great Vladivostok” for this aim.

The methodological base of work is historical-comparative and hermeneutic methods.

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The work aims to describe the realisation of the project and its main ideas, and to analyse its successes and failures.

PROCESS AND PROBLEMS OF THE PROJECT¹

The main problems of the “Great Vladivostok” realisation were a lack of qualified specialists and insufficient financing. Even the involvement of people from the western part of the USSR could not fully meet the needs of the construction campaign. Therefore, many seconded people had to be trained on the spot². Such activities require additional time and money. This affected the pace and specifics of the “Great Vladivostok” development.

Due to the invitation of many specialists and builders from other regions of the country, the decree stated their accommodation on 10% of housing space in new buildings, commissioned every year. Thus, the state encouraged the builders who worked on constructing “Great Vladivostok”. It was an important difference from the general construction sites of Stalin’s period, where coercive methods (cutting rations for failure to meet the targets, various types of censure, etc.) prevailed.

Even according to preliminary estimates, there was not enough money for the supply and development of the project, despite the economy of many budget items. According to Konstantin Dulov, a participant in this project, in October 1959, N.S. Khrushchev came to Vladivostok after he visited China and made a speech to the people. Soon the big construction of the city was announced. Still, at the same time, all the Far Eastern salary increments were eliminated – 30–40%³, which, naturally, severely affected the economic situation of the region’s inhabitants. As we mentioned earlier, the project cost exceeded the funding allocated by the state budget. Therefore, it turned out that “Great Vladivostok” was partially financed from the Far East residents’ salary funds. In addition, the Far Eastern allowances were returned only after the completion of the main construction of the city, which partially confirms our position. Despite such an extreme measure, as early as 1971, the project management acknowledged that even these funds were insufficient to complete the construction⁴.

As such, the city’s construction was accelerated, which was dictated by several important considerations: first of all, to solve the housing problem, which

¹ The authors thank V.V. Anikeev and R.E. Tlustly for providing some of the materials, consultation and help.

² Gosudarstvennyi Arhiv Primorskogo Kraia (GAPK) [State Archive of Primorye Region], F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 363.

³ Dulov K. Most cherez Zolotoj rog edva ne nachali stroit’ esche v 1980-h [The bridge across the Golden Horn almost began to be built in 80], *Komsomol’skaia Pravda*, August 9th, 2012.

⁴ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 2, D. 80, L. 14–15.

was necessary for Vladivostok’s development. And this problem was solved. But at the same time, “Great Vladivostok” had many drawbacks. They were partly due to deficiencies in the general construction plan and in solving issues that arose during the construction or changes in response to requests from Moscow.

An example of this is the building material plants. As mentioned earlier, in 1960–1963, it was planned to build four such factories in Vladivostok, which was done in time. In the future, it was designed to create several such industrial enterprises. This decision is not devoid of logic – it is better to build factories in a city where there is a large construction. But at the same time, geological work to find mineral resources needed for these industrial facilities was not carried out in advance (even though the Soviet leadership had plans for the general construction of Vladivostok in the 1930s – early 1950s). According to the decree, the geological exploration of gypsum stone⁵ in the vicinity of Vladivostok was planned for the years 1960–1961, that is, when the construction of factories was in full swing. Gypsum stone was one of these industrial facilities’ main working raw materials.

As a result, no significant deposits of gypsum stone were found in the Primorye region (the nearest is in the Perm region), but relatively small deposits of this mineral were found only in the central part of the region. But they could not meet all the needs of construction. As a result, it was planned to import gypsum from Irkutsk⁶.

Problems also arose with clay – the shortage of this raw material in construction led to the issue of importing clay from other regions of the USSR was considered. The local Rettikhovskoye deposit was unreliable, although previously, it was considered promising. Insufficiently accurate assessment of mineral deposits led to demolishing some private homes (to gain access to clay layers). Also, the factories had equipment problems – some kilns for firing were produced as early as 1910(!)⁷. Of course, this could not but affect the productivity of the entire institution. Over time, the enterprises had vehicle problems, so the clay and sand did not arrive on time. A similar situation occurred during construction and installation work⁸. Another issue that should have been accounted for was soon discovered – the produced bricks were not frost-resistant in the natural conditions of the southern Far East. Hence, the builders began adding coal to the clay, which resulted in black specks⁹ in the bricks. This contrasted sharply with the exterior design of the houses. To save money, not all construction techniques were new,

⁵ Gypsum stone is a natural mineral, a raw material for the production of gypsum. It is widely used in jewelry, medicine and construction. In our case, it was used for finishing works, etc., it was very convenient, as it is cheap, lightweight, and has relatively high thermal and sound insulation. Nowadays, gypsum stone is not so relevant for construction works, although it continues to be used.

⁶ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 367; SAPK, F. 1596, Opis’ 1, D. 2, L. 42.

⁷ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 364.

⁸ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 1.

⁹ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 364.

particularly the sound-absorbing materials such as Pemsolite, developed back in 1936¹⁰. In addition, the testing laboratories, on which many hopes were pinned, could not cope with the volume of work¹¹.

The concrete panels made by the technology developed in the country's West did not get accustomed to the project either. They were successfully used in the country's West to construct houses (Moscow, Kuibyshev). But in the cold conditions of the Primorye region, they were freezing, leaking and even bloated¹². In addition, it quickly became clear that in situ precast concrete is of poor quality. Therefore, the technology of making concrete slabs had to be improved on-site by trial and error; in particular, they were finished with ceramics. The testing base was poorly prepared, which also became an additional brake on the construction. Also, the project management had to pay attention to the careless attitude of the workers¹³ in the storage and transportation of working building materials, which led to their loss or damage. Therefore, frequent reprimands and severe reprimands became frequent for the rank-and-file construction workers and local bosses as early as 1961¹⁴. A similar situation developed with the equipment of garment factories¹⁵ and many other enterprises¹⁶.

Thus, planning for the construction of the Vladivostok plants and their operation was carried out without considering natural factors, which resulted in additional financial costs and loss of time. Some plants were eventually built in unplanned locations, and plans for constructing other industrial facilities were curtailed. This, of course, created additional challenges for the project. Why the management was sure that large deposits of gypsum stone should be near Vladivostok is unknown. Most likely, there was an error in the calculations, as in the case of the clay.

In 1984, the construction of the Great Vladivostok Project was almost completed. Reports on the successful completion of the city were presented. But in reality, implementing this master plan was both a success and a failure for the Soviet state. Why was it so?

An indisputable success was the mass housing construction, which made it possible to provide housing for the entire population and relocate people. And the initial plan for commissioning apartments was even exceeded. The cultural and household spheres of the city were arranged. During the construction, numerous attempts (in some cases successful) took place to introduce the latest ideas in architecture and improve living conditions. All this further made Vladivostok

¹⁰ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 54.

¹¹ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 2, L. 42–44; SAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 2, D. 4, L. 131–145.

¹² GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 364.

¹³ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 1.

¹⁴ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 54.

¹⁵ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 55.

¹⁶ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 829, L. 27–28.

attractive to its locals and people from other regions, which ensured a steady inflow of immigrants in Soviet and post-Soviet times¹⁷.

In addition, the buildings, which at that time were the achievement of housing construction, appeared in the city: from 1963 – 9-storey buildings, from 1968 – 12-storey ones, and in 1969 the operation of 12-storey buildings was started¹⁸. Later it turned out that all those high-rise buildings, despite being built later, had many disadvantages compared to the classic “Khrushchev” described above in a footnote.

The construction itself was, in many cases, chaotic¹⁹. In particular, there were initially plans to build a bridge over Golden Horn Bay, but the government’s assessment of resource opportunities led to the cancellation of the bridge construction option. In 1960, the “Great Vladivostok” project was supposed to be completed by 1980. Still, even despite the reduction of many points of the project, in the end, the implementation of the Master plan in the city was delayed until 1984.

The excessive emphasis on housing construction had negative moments – the urban infrastructure and other things were not considered. But, on the other hand, the city’s population grew faster than planned – in 1973, the number of inhabitants of Vladivostok was about half a million. However, the plans for population growth for the end of the project in 1980 stood at 420 thousand people²⁰. All the problems mentioned above affected the past and the city’s current state. Vladivostok always had problems with power supply and shortages of cold and hot water²¹ (according to the plan, builders proceeded from the needs of one person in 350 litres of water per day²², but in reality, the norm was less), these issues have remained topical until the 2000s.

As a result, the problem of the city’s infrastructure remains unsolved. A large part of Vladivostok stands on hills, many of them with steep precipices. The master plan did not provide a way out of this situation, so residents often have to climb up and down inconvenient staircases. In winter, this leads to an increased risk of pedestrian injury due to snow and ice. Due to the lack of straight roads in many areas of the city, streets were laid crooked²³, so in some cases, it is difficult

¹⁷ In particular, if in 1959 (before the beginning of construction) the population of Vladivostok was 290 thousand people, then in 1962 – already more than 325 thousand, in 1970 – more than 440 thousand people, and by the end of the General plan implementation – 1960 in 1985 – 605 thousand inhabitants. At the time of the USSR’s disintegration, the city population was about 648 thousand people.

¹⁸ Vlasov S., “Zhilischno- Grazhdanskoe stroitel’stvo vo Vladivostoke v 1960- e gg” [Civil building of Vladivostok in 1960s], *Progress Primor’ya* 27 (341) (2015).

¹⁹ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 55; GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 2, D. 4, L. 171–175.

²⁰ Anikeyev V. V., Obertas V. A., *General’nye plany Vladivostoka. Istoriya, Problemy, Resheniya* [The General Plans of Vladivostok: History, problems and decisions] (Vladivostok: Dalnauka, 2007), 100.

²¹ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 55; GAPK, F. 333, Opis. 1, D. 3, L. 96.

²² GAPK, F. 333, Opis. 1, D. 3, L. 4.

²³ *Ibid.*, L. 10–11.

to find house numbers even now. This has affected power transmission systems, etc. Unfortunately, Great Vladivostok could not solve this problem.

But the sewage system was an even more significant sticking point for the city. The plan did not include a system of sewage treatment facilities for the drainage system. As a result, it was decided to make the sewage drains at a relatively far distance from the city and at such depths that the sewage would not end up on the waters of beaches and other recreational areas. At the time, Soviet officials believed that the sea could recycle everything, any waste²⁴. But it turned out not to be so – many beaches near Vladivostok very quickly became contaminated due to sewage; the sea could not neutralise all the impurities from the city.

As a result, Vladivostok residents subsequently began to travel farther and farther away for seaside recreation because the pollution of waters near the city was spreading rapidly. This led to significant environmental problems on the seashore; in particular, it affected the health of some vacationers. After the end of “Great Vladivostok”, purification facilities were built in the city. But they could not process all the city sewage, which constantly discharged into the sea. Of course, they were powerless to fix the already established environmental situation in the water area – active pollution continued for decades. And in some places, no purification facilities were built at all. The same specialists did not consider the sewage discharged into the rivers or streams within and around the city.

In addition, it should be taken into account that during the work on the project, the entire system of sanitary works was behind schedule²⁵. A total of 189 km of sewers (including 93 km of storm sewers)²⁶ were planned according to the General Plan 1960. In part, this was due to the refusal to use steel pipes in the construction of sewers²⁷. But in the end, this work constantly lagged behind the plan, was completed and later, after the project was completed. Therefore, it can be concluded that the pollution of coastal waters near Vladivostok began even before the construction was completed.

The careless attitude of workers to their jobs and their own safety had its impact on the project – more than once during the construction, mass fires and other accidents occurred²⁸, which also affected the pace and quality of the development of “Great Vladivostok”, and the mood of the builders. The policy of local authorities to move large groups of workers from one site to another, which had to be completed urgently, also added to the complexity. As a result, the builders did not have time to finish their work, they were transferred to another workplace, and later their project was completed by other groups or, after some time, by themselves, but it led to a loss of pace work and time²⁹.

²⁴ Anikeyev, Obertas, *General'nye plany Vladivostoka. Istoriya, Problemy, Resheniya*, 99.

²⁵ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 364.

²⁶ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 363.

²⁷ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 54.

²⁸ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 1; SAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 829, L. 192–198.

²⁹ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1 and D. 54; SAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 2, L. 159–160.

Landscaping the city (construction of green parks, etc.), previously considered in the project, was no longer important for the city’s structure. Plants were planted in Vladivostok in large quantities, but these areas did not receive proper care and were not considered park options³⁰. The plantings were done haphazardly in places that, in the organisers’ opinion, were suitable for it. As a result, the question of green parks in the city didn’t get resolved until 1984³¹. But even today, the problem persists in the city³².

As early as 1960, project management noticed that money from the construction funds was being misappropriated. In this connection, further measures were taken to protect cash finances and punish those involved in money fraud³³. In particular, funds were disappearing during cash operations, and it was difficult to understand immediately how it happened. But we cannot say this was a new development in the Khrushchev period. During the reign of Stalin in the 1930s, embezzlement of the state budget and property in Central Asia, in some cases, exceeded 20% of everything available³⁴. And according to the archival data, local authorities and residents stole everything, including construction material, although “Great Vladivostok” avoided this fate at an early stage. But at the same time, building materials were overconsumed in some cases³⁵. The financial mess of Vladivostok construction was also caused by other incidents when the allocated amounts for facilities were not spent³⁶. But the question of misuse of funds was raised even later: in 1968, when the count reached hundreds of thousands of roubles, there were massive cases of stolen building materials³⁷. The mistakes in financial reports led to material debts of several enterprises, which took part in the “Great Vladivostok”³⁸.

As we can see, this event was a very important and relevant project for the region and the USSR. Its implementation was necessary, which was the reason for the rapid implementation of this project. Because of excessive haste, ill-conceived decisions and the short-sightedness of the leaders, this Master Plan had some mistakes and, in the economic aspect, was not entirely successful. The project constantly demanded additional financial injections from the state. Because of this, many plans were not implemented in the city’s construction (for example, a bridge across the bay, sewage treatment plants, several transport communications, etc.).

³⁰ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1 and D. 367.

³¹ Anikeyev, Obertas, *General’nye plany Vladivostoka. Istoriya, Problemy, Resheniya*, 101.

³² I.P. Petukhova, L.A. Kameneva, V.M. Urusov, “Sovremennoe sostoyanie i puti optimizacii ozeleneniya Vladivostoka i drugih naselennykh punktov Primorskogo kraja” [Modern state and ways to optimise landscaping of Vladivostok and other settlements of Primorye Region], *Bulletin of the Irkutsk State Agrarian Academy* 44 (2011): 85.

³³ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 1; GAPK, F. 1596, Opis 1, D. 2, L. 38, 119–120.

³⁴ Gosudartsvennyj Arhiv Rossiyskoj Federacii (GARF) [State Archive of the Russian Federation], F. 5446, Opis. 23, A.D. 56, L. 69–75; D. 15, L. 27–28.

³⁵ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 2, L. 161–163.

³⁶ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 55.

³⁷ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 829, L. 100–103.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, L. 190–191.

Apparently, the implementation of the “Great Vladivostok” project was influenced by the state-building system under Joseph Stalin, described by American scientist Loren Graham (Graham)³⁹. Emphasis was placed on the grandiosity and massiveness of construction plans without regard to any costs. The authoritarian management system in the Soviet Union until 1953 significantly impacted construction when constructing large objects was expensive, without considering natural and economic features and assessing long-term results (Belomorkanal, Dneproges, Magnitogorsk, etc.). As with the “Great Vladivostok”, few people paid attention to environmental issues in the Stalinist period. In addition, everything was done hurriedly, without counting on future development. Despite the fact that in 1953 the country changed its leader and style of leadership, the management system of the Soviet Union has not yet had time to rearrange in a new way. Therefore, we can say that the construction of the largest seaside city was not devoid of problems in the organisation of most major construction projects of the time in the USSR. But if Khrushchev slowly translated the construction system to a new order – taking into account the interests of builders, saving money on items that could be solved in the future, and the growing human factor, then under Leonid Brezhnev, the system of large projects again turned to the Stalinist version – BAM can serve as an example.

But it is impossible to call implementing the general plan for the Vladivostok construction of 1960 a semblance of Stalin’s construction. Khrushchev considered the material interests of builders and the local population, builders’ working conditions and possibilities. It was expressed in a firmly established 7-hour working day, review of work norms⁴⁰, high wage (up to 400 roubles per month, with minimum wage being 45–50 roubles)⁴¹ and providing them with apartments out of turn⁴². To enhance the role of socialist labour competition, the Red Banners of the USSR Ministry of Construction and the Central Committee of the Trade Union of Construction Workers and Construction Materials Industry were actively used. Collective monetary prizes were also widespread⁴³. All of the above was a pleasant regional addition to the social policy of N.S. Khrushchev, who, in addition to

³⁹ Loren R. Graham, *Prizrak kaznennogo inzhenera. Tehnologiya i padenie Sovetskogo Soyuzu* [The Ghost of the Executed Engineer. Technology and the Fall of the Soviet Union] (Spb: European House, 2000); See also *Mozhet li Rossiya konkurirovat’?* [Can Russia Compete? The Innovation History of Czar, Soviet and Modern Russia] (Moscow: Mann, Ivanov & Ferber, 2014).

⁴⁰ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 363.

⁴¹ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 709. Wage levels are based on the calculations made after the 1961 monetary reform.

⁴² GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 1. In particular, in 1961, it was decided to give all the housing built in 1960 to the builders themselves. The scheme was changed in subsequent years, and the project participants received only a percentage of the new buildings.

⁴³ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 2, D. 4, L. 25–30.

solving the housing problem for many families⁴⁴, reformed the pension system, abolished several taxes, introduced a 5-day workweek and annual wage increases for many enterprises, abolished tuition for high-school students, etc.⁴⁵.

Before receiving housing, construction workers, while waiting their turn, lived in dormitories⁴⁶ scattered throughout the region, depending on the location of the enterprise. Living conditions there could have been better, but the project administration sought to keep the dormitories orderly and supplied. In any case, it was better for the population than the barracks of the Stalinist period. In addition, the national and regional leadership tried to provide the builders with everything they needed. As we can see, there was no total coercion in implementing the Master Plan, which took place in Stalin’s construction campaigns.

RESULTS OF PROJECT

The importance of the “Great Vladivostok” project was significant both for the region and the country. Despite the numerous problems in the implementation of the general Vladivostok construction plan in 1960 – the 1970s, described above, at the time the project had a great influence on the future of this city – “Great Vladivostok” has become a kind of standard for the country’s construction in the future. For example, in the following years, all subsequent plans for the architectural development of the capital of Primorye Krai were based on it⁴⁷. Not only that, but later, the region began to develop the basics of reconstruction of the seaside cities based on this project⁴⁸.

While implementing the Master Plan, many builders gained valuable experience in working in different conditions, learned to assess the natural features of the area, and new technologies, including foreign ones, were introduced into practice. In some cases, the builders could find optimal solutions in the course of work quickly, which was also an important achievement in many aspects. And even today, the city’s new construction plan is primarily based on the 1960 project⁴⁹. “Great

⁴⁴ Steven E. Harris, *Moving to the Separate Apartment: Building, Distributing, Furnishing, and Living Urban Housing in Soviet Russia, 1950s–1960s* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 2003); Susan E. Reid, “Communist Comfort: Socialist Modernism and the Making of Cosy Homes in the Khrushchev Era”, *Gender and History* 21 (3) (2009): 465–498.

⁴⁵ S.A. Vlasov, *Zhilischoe stroitel'stvo na Dal'nem Vostoke v 1946–1991 gg.: istoricheskij opyt, rol' v reshenii zhilishchoj problemy i social'nom razvitii* [Housing Construction in the Far East in 1946–1991s: Historical Experience, Role in Solving the Housing Problem and Social Development] (Dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Historical Sciences, Irkutsk, 2014), 136–140, 402.

⁴⁶ GAPK, F. 1596, Opis. 1, D. 829, L. 241–244.

⁴⁷ Anikeyev, Obertas, *General'nye plany Vladivostoka. Istoriya, Problemy, Resheniya*, 100–107.

⁴⁸ Archiv Obshhestva izucheniia Amurskogo regiona [Society for the Study of the Amur Region of the Russian Geographical Society], F. 37, Opis. 1, D. 18, L. 2–3.

⁴⁹ P.Y. Baklanov, Y.A. Avdeyev, M.T. Romanov, “Novyj etap v razvitii Vladivostoka i ego aglomeracii” [New period in the development of Vladivostok and his agglomeration] *Territory of new opportunities. Bulletin of Vladivostok State University of Economics and Service* T. 9 (3) (2017): 33.

Vladivostok” had great importance for the Soviet Union policy – the implementation of the Master Plan construction consolidated the position of the Soviet Union in the Far East.

CONCLUSION

Thus, we can conclude that “Great Vladivostok” was an important project for the Soviet Union for domestic political and international reasons; its implementation was necessary for the Soviet state. This project was implemented relatively quickly, but with several mistakes and shortcomings, which led to increased problems in the city in the future. Therefore, the elimination of deficiencies is relevant at the present time. Even so, its importance was so great for the region’s development that it became the basis of urbanisation in Vladivostok in the following years.

This project had important significance for discussion about building reform not only in the 1960s., but for later periods too. For example, tendencies of “art house” and “economic” played an important role in building in Soviet cities⁵⁰. “Great Vladivostok” was a base for many elements of Khrushchev’s building reform in the Soviet Union.

As we can see, the project “Great Vladivostok” did not create Vladivostok as the central agglomeration in the Asian Pacific region, but Vladivostok became the main city in the Soviet Far East.

Moreover, this project had an impact on building in North China. The authors of this work visited Northeastern China and considered buildings created in the 1970s and have types, like “Khrushchevka”, with some revisions⁵¹. The importance of “Great Vladivostok” was great, not only for USSR but for other countries too, because many socialistic states used Soviet experience in building reforms with different options. We believe that regional specifics of building reforms (based on the experience of “Great Vladivostok”) will be considered later in East Asia and Eastern Europe.

⁵⁰ This question we consider in the article “Problem of «art house» and economic tendencies in the project «Great Vladivostok»”.

⁵¹ We consider this system in the work “Soviet Influence in Buildings in North China”.