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## BOOK REVIEWS

*Cities with Invisible Walls: Reinterpreting Urbanization in Post-1949 China.* By Kam Wing Chan. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1994. xiv, 193 pp. Tables, Figures, Abbreviations, Notes, Appendices, Bibliography, Index. HK\$325.

As the title suggests, this book is on legal restrictions separating the urban and rural populations — the invisible walls. The author, Kam Wing Chan tries to weave together the general theory of socialist urbanization policies and the empirical facts with data constructed by the author himself. Socialist urbanization policy *per se* according to Kam Wing Chan has its own logic and therefore he discredits the conventional wisdom that a low urban growth rate was the by-product of Mao's "rural-biased" urbanization policy. He argues that the long-term socialist governmental efforts to promote industrialization and at the same time the necessity to contain urban costs lays the genuine foundation of all socialist urbanization policies. The Chinese urbanization policy differs only in degree but not in kind with the urbanization policies of the other formerly socialist republics. The latest urban reforms according to the author reinforce the city "walls" because the Chinese governments limits the costs of urbanization by refusing to subsidise the cities' new migrants.

To sum up, this book offered a new interpretation of the allegedly unique Maoist urbanization policies by relating them to the systemic characteristics of classical socialism. As the author points out that many of the "Chinese" features identified by others are common to socialist economies under similar conditions leading to what he asserts China as just another case of "under-urbanization" in centrally planned economies (p. 149). The great value of this book is indeed the different treatment and approach adopted by the author in analysing the Chinese urbanization.

Apart from this, the book is full of information concerning the Chinese urban policies and related issues. It documents the demographic statistics and urban economic scenes in great details. The author also attempts to dispel many myths of Chinese urbanization by reconstructing his own data set instead of adopting the official statistics and official definitions (e.g. Table 2.1 Urban Population in China, 1949–1990 and Table 2.4 Components of Urban Growth by Periods). To a certain extent his efforts are rewarded by a more consistent definition so that he could compare the various scenes of Chinese urbanization over time. Though painstaking, his estimates are still estimates. It will be very difficult to testify the reliability of his estimates. In one way or another this will affect his main line of argument in this book.

Although the author takes a comparative perspective to analyse the Chinese urbanization, throughout his book very little space is devoted to describe the major characteristics of urbanization under socialism or centrally planned economies. The readers of this book thus have to be very conversant with the literatures on East European urbanization before he could appreciate the argument of Chan from the case of China. Another defect of Chan's book is that it contains too many minor details but not enough generalization. Many readers would thus lose their interests well before the end of the book. In short, this is a serious scholarly

attempt on Chinese urbanization for university teachers and research students, but not that recommendable to undergraduate students.

DAVID K. Y. CHU

*The Chinese University of Hong Kong*

