**Urbanization and its impact in contemporary China**. Edited by Peilin Li, jointly published by Social Science Academic Press, Beijing, China, and Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd, 2019. Part of the [Research Series on the *Chinese Dream and China’s Development Path*](https://link.springer.com/bookseries/13571) book series (RSCDCDP). Hardcover €77.99 (ISBN 978-981-13-2341-6), eBook €63.06 (ISBN 978-981-13-2342-3)

The ambitiously broad scope suggested by the title of the book immediately attracts readers’ attention. At present, urbanisation has been a heated topic worldwide, and China’s urbanization, in particular, has shown unprecedented speed and scale and unique socio-political and economic context. Numerous studies have looked into the impact of the rapid urbanisation in China in terms of economic sustainability, land policies, real-estate market development, urban infrastructure, urban planning and design, rural development, as well as immigration and so forth. This edited volume specifically focuses on social changes and challenges brought by the rapid urbanisation and industrialisation in China. The editor of the book and the authors of the chapters are all based in the China Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), which is affiliated with the State Council of P.R. China. The research drew data from the third Chinese Social Survey (CSS) carried out by the very institution in 2011 (in partnership with the Renmin University which also conducted the Chinese General Social Survey at the same time). The CSS is a nationwide longitudinal survey targeting China’s social changes in the transitional economy. Data was collected from over 7000 participants from over 100 counties of 29 provinces in China. Two previous CSS were carried out in 2006 and 2008 respectively of which some data are also used in the analysis for comparison purposes.

As put in the preface of the book by the president of the Social Science Academic Press, the purpose of the book series on the *Chinese Dream and China’s Development Path* is to remove the language barriers and provide audiences in other countries ‘a thorough understanding’ of the achievement of China related to reform and opening (p.v). This book serves this objective from a sociological perspective. It focuses on the increasingly widened gap between urban and rural residents in those areas including consumption patterns, labor market segmentation, educational opportunities, social integration of migrant workers and the growth of a middle class. The following offers a chapter-by-chapter brief summation of the book.

The first chapter summarises the progress of urbanisation in China, its characteristics and problems. The current stage of urbanisation is claimed to be a New Growth Phase, starting from 2001, and featuring rapid urban expansion and emergence of city clusters. The chapter mentions five urban problems ranging from social, economic to environmental issues. It presents a key question as whether China would fall into the ‘middle-income trap’ experienced by other countries with similar growth path (p.1). It essentially asks whether China can escape from this ‘trap effect’ of decreased global competitiveness due to the rise of labor cost and slow technological innovation at the middle stage of urban development. Unfortunately this question remains un-answered in the conclusion. But how China tackles the social issues emerged at present would certainly contribute to the answer of the question. The detailed methodology of data collection in the CSS 2011 is explained in Chapter 2 at first. Following this, the chapter shows the different attitudes between urban and rural residents towards migrant workers, social participation, corruption and high housing prices, which are the main concerns in society at present.

The following chapters each focus on a particular social issue related to urban-rural disparity. Chapter 3 deals with consumption behaviour which is believed to be a social construct and cultural symbol. Some western theoretic models such as the Engel’s Law (p.72) is proved to be unsuitable for Chinese society. It concludes on the differences in spending structure between urban and rural residents which lie in the quantity and quality of durable goods consumed and entertainment options available. It is noted an increasing consumption inequality between the two groups of population. Chapter 4 looks at various influential factors affecting the segmentation of labor market in big cities, small cities and countryside. It finds out that one’s education, work time for the current job, and employment types are the main variables affecting income disparity in big cities, while interpersonal relationship is a more affective factor in medium or small cities.

Chapter 5 performs a comparison between the new generation (born after 1980) and the old generation of migrant workers in terms of social integration in cities. With additional survey data, the comparison is carried out based on economic integration, social capital, psychological integration and identity. The conclusion is quite intriguing because it claims that social capital does not play a vital role in social integration because if the migrant workers only develop social capital with other migrant workers, it would result in a low degree of identity recognition as urban citizens by themselves. This is so-called ‘isolated integration’. Although the two generations of migrant workers show different integration values with regard to the four dimensions, the overall results are similar. Furthermore, the chapter concludes that the relationship among the four dimensions of integration is not progressive but dynamic. The inequality of education opportunities is analysed in Chapter 6. It reveals that the disparities in educational opportunities are the most prominent at the stage where one enters senior secondary school from junior secondary school. Once children from rural areas entered senior secondary school, they perform equally well as urban children in the competition to enter university. Nevertheless, the high unemployment rate of university graduates is an emerging problem in recent years.

Chapter 7 is also about consumption but focuses on the middle class, particularly the ‘borderline middle class’, which is defined in the Chinese context as those workers who have received higher education, or the ones who don’t have graduate qualifications but have above-average income (p.165). The author claims that the borderline middle class should be the policy target who need to be assisted to become the actual middle class. This would in turn boost domestic consumption for further urbanisation. The conclusion chapter is fairly brief and puts a stress on continued industrialisation, making relevant social policies to facilitate the social integration of migrant workers in cities, stimulating consumption, expanding the middle class, and dealing with unemployment of graduates.

As mentioned before, the book doesn’t answer the question about the ‘middle-income trap’, nor provides pragmatic policy suggestions to solve those social problems. It perhaps is unrealistic to expect an answer to this question merely from a sociological perspective. In terms of communication, the chapters are quite a tedious read with technical explanations of the statistics. The review of relevant literature in the chapters is rather limited and some references are missing. Nevertheless, with clear lines of inquiry, it is a useful reference for social science research about China for academics, businesses and policy-makers. The broad range of social issues reported in the book needs urgent political attention in China to make the current urbanisation process sustainable. With regards to future work, the social landscape in China may have changed by now since the data source used in the book is from 2011. It is not clear whether the CSS has been continued, but the Chinese General Social Survey (<http://cgss.ruc.edu.cn/>) which is part of the East Asia Social Survey family is another rich source of data for similar social research of China. It recently has published its survey data of 2015 and its scope covers globalisation, health, economy, social network & social capital, religion, environment, gender roles and so forth which can be accessed via the national archive (<http://www.cnsda.org/> ).