ing in activities such as gambling. *Pingtan*, with its proud history and tradition, has now been reduced to a way of managing the aged and maintaining a “harmonious society” (p. 267).

*Gilded Voices* is an informative book for those interested in understanding the direct and personal impact of government policy on artistes in the PRC. The performers interviewed are named, not anonymous, and the profiles are vivid and concrete. Sixteen photos of *pingtan* artistes and performances, many quite rare, are also included. The book as a whole would have benefited from editing by an English-language editor; however, *Gilded Voices* is based on first-class research and provides a picture of a fascinating and little-explored area of the performance arts in contemporary China.

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*Urban China*, by Xuefei Ren. Cambridge: Polity, 2013. xx + 218 pp. £50.00/€63.50/AU$94.95 (hardcover), £15.99/€19.90/AU$32.95 (paperback).

One of today’s most significant world-historical developments is the urbanization of the majority of humanity on the planet, as China, India and many developing countries on several continents, with more than 85 per cent of the world’s population, undergo industrialization. In this global transformation, China is possibly the most important case, for its scale, speed and apparent achievements so far. At the very least, China deserves close study, for this “real” (demographic and in terms of energy) global shift towards urbanity and modernity. It is not surprising therefore that we have seen a mushrooming of books recently on China’s urbanization. Many such books, however, tend to be specialist in approach, mostly from the disciplines of urban planning, human geography and architecture. What makes Xuefei Ren’s *Urban China* stand out is its comprehensive coverage in accessible language that allows it to appeal to a wider public.

Ren aims to provide “a comprehensive yet critical analysis of Chinese urbanization in an accessible manner”, with secondary literature and her own research and observation (p. xviii). The book covers six aspects of China’s urbanization since 1980, in six chapters: “China Urbanized”, “Governance”, “Landscape”, “Migration”, “Inequality” and “Cultural Economy”.

In Chapter 1, Ren offers a brief history of China’s economic rise and its parallel urbanization. The process is described as a two-phase development: rural reform and “urbanization” in the 1980s followed by a city-centered urbanization. Regarding critical factors behind the swift development of the past three decades, Ren suggests that we need to take both exogenous and endogenous forces se-
riously. She identifies two dominant explanations for China’s rise, one offered by those who believe (like David Harvey) that it is part of a global neoliberal process, and the other by those (for example, Giovanni Arrighi) who argue that local–historical conditions (including socialist institutions) are critical. As the book unfolds, both internal and external factors are taken into account.

In “Governance” (Chapter 2), Ren provides an introduction to the formal political structure of China and the actual practices of governing urbanization. She describes a top-down central authority and a territorial distribution of local authorities from provinces and cities to townships and villages. Former socialist governing institutions and their recent reforms are also introduced—this includes the Party, *danwei* and the *hukou* system. This chapter then describes how local governments manage urbanization in three key sectors—land, housing and infrastructure—to demonstrate how urban construction is the central means for profit-making and economic growth. Ren then moves on to observe governance at two extreme ends of the spatial scale: governance at a neighborhood level in the form of *shequ* communities, and that of vast mega-city regions such as the Pearl River Delta. The key message is that there is a shift of power and responsibilities from central ministries to territories, especially municipal governments, in land development, housing and infrastructure, without, however, a decline in the capacity of the center in a complex dialectic of power relations. In liberalizing rural-to-urban movement for urban reconstruction, however, the *hukou* system remains divisive and discriminating.

Chapter 3 (“Landscape”) examines planning practice before moving on to describe a wide variety of land use types in the city center and the “thousand-mile” periphery. The types in the center include CBDs, artists’ colonies, conservation sites, new architectural icons and residential communities of *xiaoqu*; those in the periphery include residential new towns, university towns, exclusive villas, manufacturing zones and the new eco-cities. The central players behind these developments are the Chinese state and the international flow of ideas, goods and capital.

The next two chapters study various issues of “inequality”. Chapter 4 (“Migration”) examines rural-to-urban migration and the *hukou* system that allows the rural workforce to flock to the booming cities yet denies them urban citizenship rights. This chapter also reviews two sites for migrant living and work, both in harsh conditions: the ViCs (villages in the city) and the mega-factories. Chapter 5 (“Inequality”) examines various forms of inequality: social, spatial and categorical (city-based or profession-based). In spatial terms, disadvantaged areas are found in old inner-city neighborhoods, degraded *danwei* housing compounds and the ViCs. The chapter also examines the mechanisms that produce the inequalities, such as marketization, the changing welfare regime, the *hukou* system and urban renewal projects.
The last chapter (“Cultural Economy”) shifts our perspective to another picture of the Chinese city: consumption, nightlife and the arts districts enjoyed by the urban middle class. The research here identifies three currents in the development of creative and cultural economy: marketization, global flows and state control.

Throughout the book, we find the importance of the state in leading and controlling the process of urbanization, in a complex distribution between central state power concerning long-term socioeconomic development and local municipal governments seeking immediate profit and economic growth. Ren also identifies external factors, namely, the global flow of ideas, expertise and capital. The book persistently singles out inequality in citizenship rights as institutionalized by the hukou system, which has constructed the urban–rural divide and disadvantaged migrant workers. Ren is critical of the practice, and also argues for a specifically Chinese approach, namely the gated compounds generating active social life in China and the hybrid, dense and public-transport-based Chinese urban periphery. On the whole, this book is broad and comprehensive, rather than deep and analytical. It covers a great amount of information in an easy and elegant style. It glides through issues of different disciplinary areas fluently. The book is a significant contribution to introducing the process of China’s urbanization.

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Social Security Policy in Hong Kong: From British Colony to China’s Special Administrative Region, by Chak Kwan Chan. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011. xiv + 216 pp. US$70.00/£44.95 (hardcover), US$70.00/£44.95 (eBook).

Chak Kwan Chan’s Social Security in Hong Kong is a well-written book on Hong Kong’s social welfare policies, developed from his PhD research 18 years ago, but information on the policy direction of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government after the handover of the sovereignty in 1997 has also been well updated.

The book consists of ten chapters, categorized into three parts. The four chapters of Part I elaborate the analytical frameworks used in the book. In Chapter 1, Chan lays down his key research question: how has Hong Kong been able to maintain a minimal welfare system and a low tax rate for more than 160 years? His answer is that both the British colonial government and the HKSAR gov-