

long-established Chinese statecraft ideas led Chinese regimes from the imperial era to the present to draw administrative boundaries 'not to encompass communities with common interests and levels of urbanization, but as much as possible to create standard units containing a mix of urban and rural conditions'.<sup>5</sup> This may help explain why Wuxi's industrialists and urban managers were not successful when, as Lincoln argues in chapters 3 and 4, they sought 'autonomy' by proposing special administrative districts – a 'commercial settlement' (*shangbu* 商埠, which might be better translated as 'commercial development zone') in the early 1920s and a Wuxi city government in the late 1920s. It is not clear what exactly this autonomy would have involved and whether it would actually have made a difference in how Wuxi developed, given Lincoln's argument that local magnates and the Nationalist (and later the Japanese-sponsored) developmental state had the same goals and many interpersonal connections. As Lincoln's study helps to show, there was a considerable degree of consensus among twentieth-century Chinese elites about policies in regard to economic development, and Chinese statecraft helped shape this consensus in some respects more than theories imported from abroad.

Lincoln makes a strong case for the value of 'urbanization' as a perspective from which to view twentieth-century Chinese history. Despite reservations about the temporal framework of the argument, I believe the book will be of great interest to scholars of Chinese history and urban history in general.

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**Shane Ewen**, *What Is Urban History?* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016. 173 pp. £45.00 hbk, £14.99 pbk.  
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Cycling to work in the morning is a distracting experience. I am confronted by three lane roundabouts and multiple sets of traffic lights, weave between buses and cars blasting their horns, and past boarded-up Victorian churches and incongruent 1960s office blocks. On my way home, the streets are dark, under the flicker of sodium lamps the city's late-night revellers play, shout and enter neon lit bars which have appeared seemingly out of nowhere since the morning. So how do we make sense of this agglomeration of signs, sites and spectacles which make up the modern urban environment? Today's city is the result of layers of urban governance, the campaigns of urban civil society, the transferral of transnational urban expertise and multinational capital. As such, we can tell this story in remarkably diverse ways: as architectural history, intellectual history, economic history or the history of experience and emotion.

It is this diverse, complex story which Shane Ewen guides us through in his new book, *What Is Urban History?* Across six chapters, Ewen surveys the study of urban history, stopping along the way to unpack the myriad of sources, themes and questions which have animated, energized and sometimes obsessed the discipline.

<sup>5</sup> K. Stapleton, 'Chinese cities, 1900 to the present', in Peter Clark (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Cities in World History* (Oxford, 2013), 522–41.

After a brief introduction, the book opens with a survey of the institutional and development of the discipline of urban history. While in many ways the cast of characters is familiar – the contribution of Jim Dyos, Richard Roger and Bob Morris all feature – he also shows the influence of scholars working on cities outside Europe including Matthew Gandy, the Mumbai Studies Group and Ruth Rogaski. He then goes on to treat the discipline thematically, exploring urban governance, space and identities and urban culture and modernity. In particular, Ewen's own scholarly background can be discerned through his thoughtful treatment of urban environmental history, including fire, flooding and disaster, and his final chapter, which suggests new directions in transnational urban history. Here, his work is particularly beneficial, providing an indication of the way in which the field can move from a traditional focus on place to a conceptual framework animated by networks, mobilities and flows of people and information. Along the way, he discusses productive examples of work in each of these fields, from research on Toronto gay bars, to philanthropic Victorian slummers and international town planners.

Some really striking points emerge from this story. First, the sheer volume of work encompassed by urban history, its sophistication and the range of approaches, methods and research questions encompassed by the umbrella term 'urban history'. Moving from chapters on historiographical preoccupations of the last 30 years, from social geographies of cities, to power and governmentality and research on urban modernities, one is left wondering if urban history really is a unified field at all, and how scholars working on these topics can relate to, and learn from, each other. Equally apparent is Ewen's notable erudition in being able to move between nineteenth-century Manilla and twenty-first-century New York, and, moreover, his ability to weave a cogent narrative from this mass of research and scholarship.

Ewen's work is the best introduction to the field of urban history on the market and should be the standard text for undergraduate and postgraduate students approaching the history of cities for the first time. It provides an entry point to the field which is simultaneously understandable and sophisticated, and will provide students with an ideal jumping off point for further studies in the field. Moreover, it will also be worthwhile reading for more established scholars. Through an exploration of the concerns of urban history from the sixties to the present day, Ewen's text displays the richness of the field but also flags the potential for so much more work which could be done. Examples include the experience of non-elites in transnational flows of urban knowledge and experience, daily life in the city during the period of post-war urban renewal, the nature of private finance in creating the modern city. This is a fitting sign of the health and vitality of the discipline, and a mark of the success of Ewen's book.

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