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# Unending Capitalism

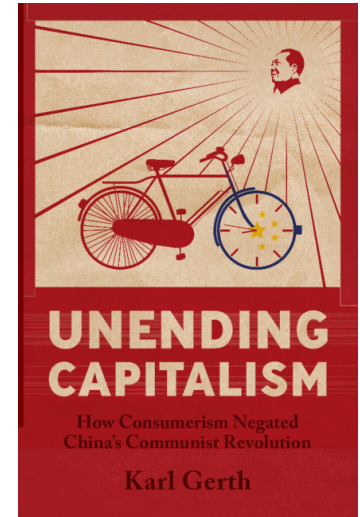
How Consumerism Negated China's Communist Revolution

**Karl Gerth**

*University of California, San Diego*

What forces shaped the twentieth-century world? Capitalism and communism are usually seen as engaged in a fight-to-the-death during the Cold War. With the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party aimed to end capitalism. Karl Gerth argues that despite the socialist rhetoric of class warfare and egalitarianism, Communist Party policies actually developed a variety of capitalism and expanded consumerism. This negated the goals of the Communist Revolution across the Mao era (1949–1976) down to the present. Through topics related to state attempts to manage what people began to desire - wristwatches and bicycles, films and fashion, leisure travel and Mao badges - Gerth challenges fundamental assumptions about capitalism, communism, and countries conventionally labeled as socialist. In so doing, his provocative history of China suggests how larger forces related to the desire for mass-produced consumer goods reshaped the twentieth-century world and remade people's lives.

Introduction: consumerism and capitalism; 1. Self-expanding and compulsory consumerism; 2. Building state capitalism across 1949; 3. Soviet influences on state consumerism; 4. State consumerism in advertising, posters, and films; 5. State consumerism in the service sector; 6. Consumerism in the cultural revolution; 7. The Mao badge phenomenon as consumer fad; Afterword; Bibliography; Index.



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'A brilliantly researched and analysed account of consumerism during the Mao era. It richly documents the survival of consumer impulses and behaviour amid the puritanical ideology of the early People's Republic. This is a crucial book for understanding the social, economic and political history of the Mao era, and the tensions and tragedies resulting from the Communist Party's state capitalism.'

**Julia Lovell,**  
*author of Maoism: A Global History*



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