

Postsocialist Modernity

Chinese Cinema, Literature, and
Criticism in the Market Age

JASON MCGRATH



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Worlds in Fragments: Culture and the Market Under Postsocialist Modernity

China has seldom loomed so large in the Western imagination. During the early stages of the post-Cultural Revolution era of “reform and opening” (*gaige-kai-fang*) the mainstream view of China in the West wavered between patronizing approval for Deng Xiaoping’s introduction of limited market reforms and equally condescending disapprobation for the continuation of authoritarian political rule. And yet, by the turn of the century a scant two decades or so later, China suddenly appeared as an economic juggernaut destined to overtake the United States as the world’s largest economy. Whether viewed with alarm or with excitement at the possibility of cashing in on China’s success, what is now unquestioned is that China has transformed from a secondary player in the second (or third) world to a central force—perhaps eventually *the* central force—in the global capitalist system.

This book is about Chinese culture during the latter stage of the reform era, when cultural production itself went from being largely socialized to mostly marketized. My study makes no claim whatsoever to being comprehensive—no single book could possibly do that—nor even to being representative. Instead, through close readings of a relatively small number of critical essays, films, and works of fiction, I hope to examine how various cultural texts have reflected, and reflected *on*, the “going to market” of Chinese culture and society in general during the postsocialist period. In this introductory chapter, I argue that not only have the forces of marketization resulted in a new cultural logic in China,