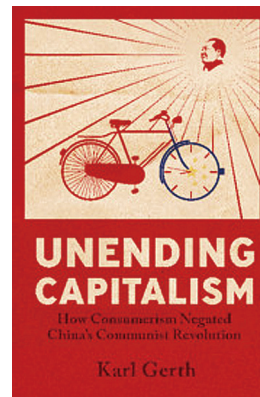


rather than presenting a series of instant snapshots of the city, an approach that would have rendered this book quickly out of date due to the escalating pace of change that has engulfed the HKSAR, their work investigates how the city's problems and tribulations first arose by employing a historical approach. This shows that their high-definition method encompasses an in-depth understanding of Hong Kong's highly complicated past that would prevent analysts from misdiagnosing the root causes of the HKSAR's ongoing afflictions. It is nevertheless worth noting that the reference sections of this monograph include mostly works by other Hong Kong scholars. While the authors ably synthesise the works of leading Hong Kong scholars, a criticism could be made that there is an absence of primary research in their monograph.

In the postscript, the authors mention that they are witnessing a revival of Hong Kong studies, an outcome to which they have tried their best to contribute by successfully demonstrating that Hong Kong is indeed deserving of serious academic scrutiny. Regardless of whether Hong Kong studies is experiencing a renaissance, Chiu and Siu have produced a thought-provoking work on one of the most important cities in China. China specialists should thank them for their willingness to publish a monograph that could be seen as controversial in these highly unusual times.



GERTH, Karl. 2020.
Unending Capitalism: How Consumerism Negated China's Communist Revolution.
 Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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The third book in what is a very intriguing trilogy exploring consumerism in China over the decades, Karl Gerth's *Unending Capitalism: How Consumerism Negated China's Communist Revolution* provides a look at the unique way in which consumerism thrived amidst and despite China's socialism goals. The trilogy explores a previously overlooked topic: the origin and growth of consumerism in China. When the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took power in 1949, it aimed to end capitalism. Gerth notes, however, that three decades later, capitalism seems to have survived and even trumped communism as the driving force behind China's economy. The book offers a new look at the apparent failure of communism in China by examining the factors that fuelled consumerism in China. Its author emphasises "the mass production of consumer products, the proliferation of a discourse about these products in popular media, and the use of such products to create and communicate identities" (p. 1) as the key factors responsible for the flourishing of consumerism in China, nevertheless clarifying that these factors were in existence in the pre-revolution period and that CCP's policies led to their expansion.

The CCP's professed intention was to build socialism by eliminating elements of capitalism, including its consumerist expressions. However, consumerism became a structural consequence of the CCP's social and economic policies (p. 2) that prioritised economic growth and technological advancement in order to match rival nations. For example, to accumulate national capital, it was necessary to restrict the inflow of imports and, consequently, the outflow of capital. The CCP used coercive tactics to influence the consumption of domestically produced products. Despite an awareness that these policy outcomes posed a threat to the CCP's communist goals, they were necessary for the economic growth of the People's Republic. The Party mobilised citizens to purchase local products, promoting consumerism to build domestic capital. The Party's industrialisation goals were prioritised over the long-term goals of becoming a communist state.

Chapter One looks at consumerism's expanding and self-perpetuating nature and how it grew in China. Although consumerism initially struggled in China because of the age-old ethos of "frugality and dislike for identities communicated through commodities" (p. 10), it actually grew. People felt compelled to acquire the "Three Great Things" (*san da jian* 三大件), namely wristwatches, bicycles, and sewing machines. These then-luxury items had been typically hard to obtain before the late 1950s and were only found in the homes of the wealthy because they were usually imported or made by foreign-owned companies in China. However, the recovery of the domestic industry made these things more readily available to the wider population. Eventually, the Three Great Things became available even in rural China and dropped from the category of luxury goods, being replaced by televisions, washing machines, and refrigerators. As the increased access to the Three Great Things was viewed as tangible evidence of socialist success, the CCP was careful to promote their consumption as it went hand in hand with industrialisation, which the Party highly valued.

Chapter Two analyses how the state participated in the popularisation of consumerism. As the Communist Party approached victory, its leaders became aware of the need to cooperate with urban economic elites rather than antagonise them. Therefore, although in direct contradiction to its communist rhetoric, the Party "only gradually shifted the institutional arrangements of capitalism toward greater state control over capital and consumption" rather than completely negating capitalism in favour of building socialism (p. 41). Realising that allowing the army to loot factories, plunder personal possessions, and confiscate private property in wealthy areas such as Shanghai would create an impediment to the new government gaining popular support and rebuilding the economy, the Party chose to use Shanghai to assuage the fears of the economic elites by demonstrating that it meant to prioritise order and create a conducive environment for economic revival. Thus started the policy contradictions that shaped the nation's consumerist nature, expanding it to greater heights. CCP policy contradictions are best understood from the background from which they were formulated. China had faced years of war that had left the country destitute. Additionally, the country faced threats from both domestic and foreign rivals who were much more technologically advanced than it was. The country also faced the task of consolidating disputed areas such as Tibet, Taiwan, and Xinjiang. Finally, its entry into the Korean War necessitated additional capital for manufacturing and purchasing weapons. Therefore, the Party chose to sacrifice the long-term goal of socialism for short-term capital gains (p. 44).

Chapter Three notes the Soviet Union's influence on PRC's consumerism. In addition to seeking military and economic assistance, China also sought to borrow the socialist institutional arrangements that had helped the Soviets accumulate capital rapidly. These arrangements of rapid capital accumulation included turning rural areas into noncapitalist production zones (p. 79). The CCP promoted all things Soviet, including its material and cultural manifestations such as fashion. The government engaged in advertising to shape consumerism to focus on the products and values that it deemed important. Although this relationship did not last, as Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated by the late 1950s, it had an impact on the population's consumerism trend.

The state's use of advertising to promote the type of consumerism it preferred is extensively covered in Chapter Four. Gerth provides examples of how the CCP utilised advertising to promote the public narrative. However, despite the promotion of consumerism focusing on the products that the CCP felt would boost the country's image as rapidly developing, basic necessities were in short supply. Long queues of people waiting hours to get basic necessities were common (p. 134). At the height of the Great Leap Forward in 1959, queues for vegetables, meat, and herbs were the norm. The prioritisation of industrialisation over meeting basic public needs was one of the CCP's failures.

Unending Capitalism is a well-researched book about rising consumerism within a socialist society. The book provides a detailed look at how the need for speedy economic growth and industrialisation led to the CCP's decision to prioritise capitalism over long-term socialist goals. Gerth effectively demonstrates how China navigated the conflicting rhetoric offered by the government and was trying to balance the need for industrialisation with its promises of a socialist dream. By connecting the various events and forces facing China during the Mao era, Gerth presents a convincing explanation of the CCP's choices that can be summarised under his opportune wording: "party promises of communist ends justified its capitalist means" (p. 5).