

# The Urban Generation

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Chinese Cinema and Society  
at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century

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Since the early 1990s, as mainland China's state-owned movie studios have struggled with financial and ideological constraints, an exciting alternative cinema has developed. Dubbed the "Urban Generation," this new cinema is driven by young filmmakers who emerged in the shadow of the events at Tiananmen Square in 1989. What unites diverse directors under the "Urban Generation" rubric is their creative engagement with the wrenching economic and social transformations underway in China. "Urban Generation" filmmakers are vanguard interpreters of the confusion and anxiety triggered by the massive urbanization of contemporary China. This collection brings together some of the most recent original research on this emerging cinema and its relationship to Chinese society. Scholars analyze the historical and social conditions that gave rise to the Urban Generation, its aesthetic uniqueness, and its ambivalent relationship to China's mainstream film industry and the international film market. The contributors focus attention on the Urban Generation cinema's sense of social urgency, its documentary impulses, and its representations of gender and sexuality. They highlight the characters who populate this new urban cinema: ordinary and marginalized city dwellers including aimless bohemians, petty thieves, prostitutes, police officers, postal workers, taxi drivers, migrant workers and the fact that these 'floating urban subjects' are often portrayed by non-professional actors. Some contributors concentrate on specific films or filmmakers; others survey broader concerns. Together the twelve essays in this collection give a multifaceted account of a significant, ongoing cinematic and cultural phenomenon.

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