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Dragon in a Three-Piece Suit is an innovative sociological examination of what is perhaps the main engine of economic reform in China, the large industrial firm. Doug Guthrie, who spent more than a year in Shanghai studying firms, interviewing managers, and gathering data on firms' performance and practices, provides the first detailed account of how these firms have been radically transformed since the mid-1980s. Guthrie shows that Chinese firms are increasingly imitating foreign firms in response both to growing contact with international investors and to being cut adrift from state support. Many firms, for example, are now less likely to use informal hiring practices, more likely to have formal grievance filing procedures, and more likely to respect international institutions, such as the Chinese International Arbitration Commission. Guthrie argues that these findings support the de-linking of Western trade policy from human rights, since it is clear that economic engagement leads to constructive reform. Yet Guthrie also warns that reform in China is not a process of inevitable Westernization or of managers behaving as rational, profit-maximizing agents. Old habits, China's powerful state administration, and the hierarchy of the former command economy will continue to have profound effects on how firms act and how they adjust to change. With its combination of rigorous argument and uniquely rich detail, this book gives us the most complete picture yet of Chinese economic reform at the crucial level of the industrial firm.
