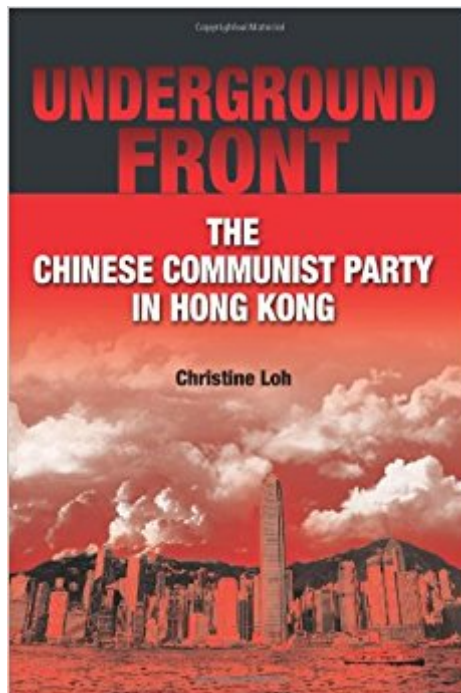


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Underground Front: The Chinese Communist Party In Hong Kong



Synopsis

Underground Front is a pioneering examination of the role that the Chinese Communist Party has played in Hong Kong since the creation of the Party in 1921, through to the present day. This book brings events right up to date and includes the results of a survey about the Hong Kong public's attitude towards the CCP.

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Customer Reviews

Hong Kong is ruled by thoroughly appalling British imperialism, it is the enemy of four million Hong Kong compatriots … in the past 100 years or so, British imperialism committed every crime in Hong Kong, and should be held accountable for the monstrous sins!… To achieve this, it is necessary to boldly arouse the masses. With the working class as the nucleus, all patriotic and anti-imperialist forces in Hong Kong that can be united should be united and the ranks for struggle against British violence continuously consolidated and expanded. (People's Daily)

Christine Loh is the CEO of the public policy think tank, Civic Exchange. A former legislator, she had a ringside seat to political events in Hong Kong in the run-up to 1997 and immediately beyond the transition. She was the first, and only one to date, to raise a debate in 1995 about how the Chinese Communist Party would operate post-1997 for which she was pilloried by opponents. Christine Loh is a lawyer by training and became a politician in 1992. Since her retirement from politics in 2000, she has concentrated on policy research and is a published author of many works.

Essential reading for anyone trying to understand how Hong Kong politics works.

Ever since the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was founded in 1921, Hong Kong has consistently been regarded as a threat and opportunity by party leaders. First as a British colony until retrocession in 1997 and then as part of the "one country, two systems," the CCP views the territory as a potential springboard from which foreign powers could undermine the authorities on the mainland. Simultaneously, Hong Kong was the main platform where both the British and Chinese governments could conduct dialogue and, as 1997 approached, a source of much-needed capital and an instrument to test special administrative rule. This, and much more, is the focus of former Hong Kong legislator Christine Loh's fascinating *Underground Front*. The amount of information contained in her well-researched book makes it an extremely useful tool to understand the CCP's policies in Hong Kong. Loh walks us through what she sees as the six main phases of CCP relations with Hong Kong: early Marxism in Hong Kong; the early years of CCP rule in China; the Cultural Revolution; the Deng Xiaoping era; the post-Tiananmen Square Massacre era; and the first decade after retrocession. Throughout this time -- and even after Hong Kong became a special administrative region -- we see the CCP acting as if it were a criminal organization forced to remain underground. Part of this, we learn, is the result of Maoism's lack of mass appeal in Hong Kong, which since the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842 had been ideologically shaped by the British. Though the seeds of leftist thought were sown in Hong Kong, mostly via trade unions, Beijing was forced to show restraint lest its actions provoke a strong response from London. The exile of more than 1 million Chinese to Hong Kong -- including supporters of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), industrialists, and ordinary Chinese who had grown tired of political repression -- also created a population stratum that was unreceptive to Maoism. On the 1967 Riots that erupted in Hong Kong, Loh uncovers proof of indirect support by the CCP (for example, through condemnation of the Hong Kong authorities' reaction to the riots in state-owned newspapers) given to the leftist protesters. In the tense situation, premier Zhou Enlai stands out as the uber pragmatist, who despite calls by ultra-leftists in Beijing to take Hong Kong by force, insisted on a "go slow" approach to the colony, saying the time was not ripe for reunification. In the early 1980s, with Deng now in charge of national policy, the first signs of an entente between London and Beijing emerge on the return of Hong Kong to China (Beijing never recognized its loss of sovereignty over the territory and successfully fought a battle at the UN to have it derecognized as a colonial entity). As the negotiations commenced, Beijing made use of its Xinhua news agency bureau in Hong Kong, which served as a cover for

CCP political action. Between 1983 and 1997, fearing it could not trust London -- especially in the wake of the Tiananmen Square Massacre -- Beijing introduced tens of thousands (by some accounts, 83,000) of fifth-columnists, ostensibly on "family reunion" visits, to ensure steady progress toward reunification. As 1997 approached, Beijing and its proxies in Hong Kong intensified their united front strategy and co-opted the colony's elite to ensure stability in the lead-up to, and after, retrocession. Loh adroitly captures Beijing's hard-line approach to the last governor, Chris Patten, which it referred to as "a sinner of a thousand years" for what it saw as efforts to create instability prior to the handover. From London's view, the only way it could abandon the colony with honor was to sow the seeds of democracy, which is what Patten tried to accomplish by making alterations to the Joint Declaration, which stipulated the basic policies of the PRC in Hong Kong and would later serve as the basic constitutional document behind the Basic Law. Interestingly, after retrocession the CCP continues to act as an underground body in Hong Kong, relying instead on political proxies, such as the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB) and the Federation of Trade Unions, to accomplish its objectives. This is perhaps the result of Beijing's failure, prior to retrocession, to understand the high level of opposition to reunification among the residents of Hong Kong. A low profile, rather than the shock therapy of a full CCP takeover of Hong Kong politics, may have been seen as the best strategy. Still, there is no doubt who's in charge under "one country, two systems." Though Loh makes little effort to hide her preference for a more democratic Hong Kong, her work does not descend into outright condemnation of the CCP on ideological grounds. She recognizes that historical forces have resulted in a Hong Kong whose political future is very much determined by the central government in Beijing. This, however, does not mean that she isn't critical of what has happened to Hong Kong since it became part of "one country, two systems." The last section, in which she looks at the local media and electoral manipulation, constitutional contradictions as well as the failure of an executive-led, elite-driven administration to meet the needs of the population, clearly shows that Loh is uneasy with the direction in which Hong Kong has headed since 1997. *Underground Front* is an indispensable addition to Hong Kong, CCP and China studies and manages to provide lots of information, both in the text and appendixes, in a format that is both entertaining and does not overwhelm even the lay reader. (This review was originally published in the Taipei Times, on Sunday, April 25, 2010, p. 14.)

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