China Perspectives

2010/3 | 2010

Taiwan: The Consolidation of a Democratic and Distinct Society

Christine Loh, *Underground Front: The Chinese Communist Party in Hong Kong*

Jean-Philippe Béja

Édition électronique

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/5321>

DOI : 10.4000/chinaperspectives.5321

ISSN : 1996-4617

Éditeur

Centre d'étude français sur la Chine contemporaine

Édition imprimée

Date de publication : 15 septembre 2010

ISSN : 2070-3449

Référence électronique

Jean-Philippe Béja, « **CHRISTINE LOH, UNDERGROUND FRONT: THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY IN HONG KONG** », *China Perspectives* [En ligne], 2010/3 | 2010, mis en ligne le 09 février 2011, consulté le 22 septembre 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/5321> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.5321>

Ce document a été généré automatiquement le 22 septembre 2020.

© All rights reserved

Christine Loh, *Underground Front: The Chinese Communist Party in Hong Kong*

Jean-Philippe Béja

- 1 Christine Loh, *Underground Front: The Chinese Communist Party in Hong Kong*, Hong Kong University Press, 2010, 372 pp.

Readers might remember the young legislator who thought nothing of risking the wrath and insults of villagers in Hong Kong's New Territories while championing women's inheritance rights.¹ They would know about the work of the Civic Exchange CEO seeking to protect the harbour and more generally the environment of Hong Kong. ² This indefatigable activist has now tackled a rather sensitive subject: the role of the Chinese Communist Party in Hong Kong. She says in her introduction that she has always had a fascination for the Party. Interest in the subject erupted anew last year when Hong Kong politicians close to Beijing were asked whether they were Party members. Legislative Council president Tsang Yok-sing refused to answer. His reason: "Hong Kong people's attitude to the concept of the Communist Party is very negative" (p. 10). A similar response came from Leung Chun-ying, a possible candidate to succeed Hong Kong Chief Executive Donald Tsang.

One would look in vain in this book for a list of clandestine Party members. Christine Loh has relied essentially on published sources, choosing to stay clear of the guessing game as to who is or is not a closet Party member. A survey conducted for the book in Hong Kong showed that 36 percent of respondents backed transparency, 2.8 percent thought a declaration should be made in the future, and 46.8 percent felt things should "continue as they are" (p. 12). But how does one get around the fact that a party that rules China, and that everyone thinks has perhaps tens of thousands of members in the Special Administrative Region (SAR) of Hong Kong, is still underground? Why do Hong Kong's Communists continue to hide? It has already been 13 years since the British sailed away. Loh's book does not, however, seek to address these questions.

Rather than being a treatise on the underground Party in Hong Kong, the book is an excellent synthesis of Beijing's policies towards Hong Kong.

In the first two chapters, Loh offers a brief analysis of the strike-boycott that hit Hong Kong in 1925. She says, "The labour movement in HK was basically halted for the next two decades after the Strike-Boycott" (p. 52). She recalls that during China's Republican era, Hong Kong served as a haven for Communists fleeing the mainland, and that the Guangdong Party committee was headquartered in the city (p. 56). However, she does not dwell at length on the period before the Communists took power in China, or on the years preceding the Cultural Revolution. In one paragraph that stands out, she notes how Beijing promoted leftist schools in the British colony. They accounted for between 10,000 and 20,000 out of the total of 300,000 pupils in the 1950s. In 1959, there were 1,263 establishments with a total of up to 70,000 pupils (p. 90). Even then, the Party was preparing to train the elites who would take over from the British, but the colonial authorities were not indifferent to this policy and used all legal means they could to frustrate it. After the 1967 riots in Hong Kong, conflicts declined in part due to a drop in the number of students attending Communist schools (p. 91).

Another interesting detail in the book concerns the contradictions between Hong Kong's radical pro-Communists and the Chinese authorities. Loh cites the memoirs of Xu Jiatun (the former Xinhua chief in Hong Kong) to note that Chen Yi once "expressed his disapproval towards the CCP in Hong Kong and tactfully commended their 'radical left' behaviour as 'pathetic and lovely'" (p. 95). Although the book contains no revelations on China's role in the 1967 riots in Hong Kong, Christine Loh does note the contradictions between the interests of local leftists and the Beijing government led by Zhou Enlai. It would have been worth knowing whether these differences have had any lasting impact on Hong Kong's leftists.

In the following chapters, Loh offers a detailed and well-informed account of Beijing's implementation of its traditional united front policy for retaking the colony, based on Xu's memoirs as well as other published accounts of former officials.

She does not, however, delve into leftist activists' reaction to the nomination in 1996 of a tycoon (Tung Chee-hwa) to take over as Hong Kong's chief executive the following year, or to that of a former colonial official (Donald Tsang) to succeed him. It would also have been interesting to know more about the nature of relations between the DAB (the pro-Beijing Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong) and the Communist Party.

Thus, readers expecting a detailed description of relations between China and "leftist forces" in Hong Kong will be disappointed. They will, however, find a valuable synthesis of the history of relations between China and the territory. With modesty, Loh has described her book as "an outsider's view of the story of the Communist Party in Hong Kong," voicing the hope that when the Party's archives are opened up, scholars will have much more to write about. It would certainly be gratifying if this hope is realised, because the issue of the Communist Party's role in Hong Kong is essential for an understanding of the SAR's political life.

NOTES

1. Selina Chan Ching, “Des indigènes indignés” (Indignant Natives), *Perspectives chinoises*, n° 22, March-April 1994.
2. Christine Loh, “Alive and well but frustrated: Hong Kong’s civil society”, *China Perspectives*, n° 2007/2, pp 40-45.