Preparing Citizens for the New Regime: Hong Kong and the Campaign against Liberalism on the Eve of the 1949 Liberation in China

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Abstract

It has been know that in the late 1940s, hundreds of political refugees, including intellectuals, democrats as well as leftists, members of minor parties, radical students and youths, and underground communists, took sanctuary in Hong Kong from Guomindang's further suppression of the democratic movement and leftist activities in mainland China. Remained to be explored in depth are the impressively effective campaigns carried out among insiders by the leftists and underground communists in the colony to consolidate the revolutionary camp by undertaking cultural work and united-front activities, running newspapers, publishing companies, printing houses, schools, and so forth. While military, and political, victory was within sight, the revolutionary activists took further steps in 1948 to radicalize the democrats, who were taking temporary shelter in Hong Kong, by launching a campaign to criticize the "middle-of-the roaders" who attempted to set up a third force, hoping to strike a balance between the Communists and Nationalists. This effort to establish the hegemony of revolutionary culture, as a part of the Communist rectification work on the eve of Liberation, proved to be crucial in crystallizing a unified political culture with revolution as its core. While ramifications of the problem of ideological unification became obvious later, the immediate effect of the campaign was the preparation of a large group of supportive elite citizens for the new state which had established its legitimation among the democrats turned supporters of the revolution. As a result, almost all of them returned to the mainland to serve the new regime established in 1949. If the cultural work and united-front activities organized by leftists stranded in Hong Kong in the late 1940s can be included in the state making effort of the Communists, the paradox is that they all took place very swiftly in a brief respite of political freedom in the city before the colonial government tightened up its control over political activities there.