The British Empire and the Early Cold War: A Comparison of Hong Kong and Cyprus


Abstract

This thesis seeks to re-define the Cold War as first and foremost a conflict of imperialisms and to identify how it was fought on the ground. It does so by identifying and comparing British policies in two geostrategic colonies, Hong Kong (1938-1952) and Cyprus (1941-1955), where there operated two of what policymakers considered to be the British Empire’s most critical communist threats: the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL). The thesis examines the motivations and actions of British colonial policymakers, as they attempted to recover Britain’s great power status and imperial prestige, against the challenges of international anti-colonialism, colonial nationalisms, and, above all, the seemingly coordinated efforts of colonial, national, and transnational communist movements to undermine the British Empire. This British revisionist study argues that British imperialism (as well as that of the Soviet Union) started, defined the nature of, and was transformed in response to the Cold War.

Item Type: Thesis (Doctoral)
Faculty \ School: Faculty of Arts and Humanities, School of History
Depositing User: Jonathan Clark
Date Deposited: 12 Jan 2015 13:00
Last Modified: 31 Jan 2020 01:38
URI: https://ueaeprints.uea.ac.uk/id/eprint/51745
DOI:

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Accessibility Statement
Legal Statements

Linking two defining narratives of the twentieth century, Sutton’s comparative study of Hong Kong and Cyprus – where two of the empire’s most effective communist parties operated – examines how British colonial policy-makers took to cultural and ideological battlegrounds to fight the anti-colonial imperialism of their communist enemies in the Cold War. The structure and intentional nature of the British colonial system grants unprecedented access to British perceptions and strategies, which sought to balance constructive socio-political investments with regressive and self-defeating repression. The structure and intentional nature of the British colonial system grants unprecedented access to British perceptions and strategies, which sought to balance constructive socio-political investments with regressive and self-defeating repression.