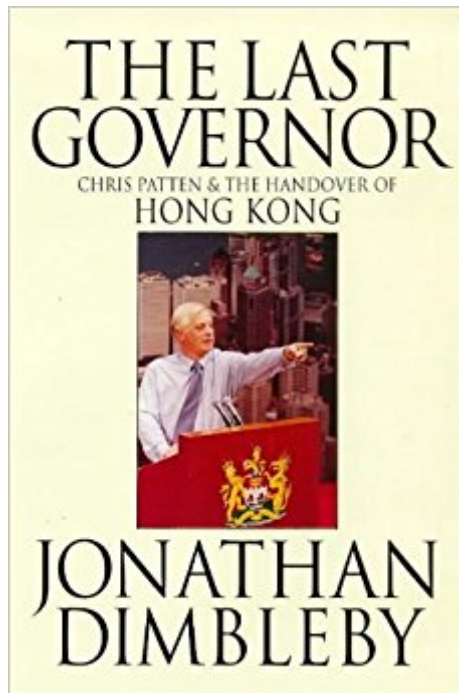




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The Last Governor: Chris Patten & The Handover Of Hong Kong



Synopsis

In July 1997, Hong Kong will cease to be a British colony and revert to the People's Republic of China. Five million people lost their status as British subjects and became citizens of a Special Administrative Region of the PRC. It was always clear that the last five years of British rule would be fraught with uncertainty. For this reason, the appointment of the former Chairman of the Conservative Party, Chris Patten, in June 1992 as the last governor of Hong Kong, was greeted with widespread approval. With rare and privileged access to the governor and his team, the author provides an insight into events leading up to the handover, including reasons why relations between China and Britain were at their lowest ebb for a generation. The situation is placed in its human and historical context.

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Customer Reviews

This book interweaves the stories of a unique city and a controversial politician. Appointed governor of Hong Kong in 1992, Chris Patten was to prepare the prosperous colony for Communist Chinese rule, a reversal of the independence normally associated with the end of colonialism, in 1997. Though his hands were tied by politics and history, Patten did his courageous best to develop democratic structures that would survive China's takeover. Besides bitter Chinese opposition, he faced resistance at home from compliant British diplomats to firebrand Hong Kong politicians, even some members of the local business community who feared profits would be lost in any confrontation with China. Dimpleby's access as a close friend of Patten gives credibility to his behind-the-scenes account. Of particular value are his descriptions of the machinations of the

foreign office in London and civil service in Hong Kong, and his analysis of the tortuous creation of political systems that led to Hong Kong's first, and possibly last, direct election in 1995. In the process, he lays to rest the notion that Hong Kong people do not care about democratic freedoms and are interested only in getting rich. He tells a lively tale of a fearless man who began his impossible task reviled by the local press but who left the colony, tears in his eyes, having gained the trust of his charges. --John Stevenson --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

“Extraordinary” Dimbleby [is] a lucid and eloquent writer. -- Jonathan Mirsky, NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS
“Remarkable” contains allegations against British Prime Ministers and officials as astonishing as anything in recent imperial history” -- Simon Jenkins, THE TIMES --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Jonathan Dimbleby's *The Last Governor* is a tour de force that gives the reader an insider's perspective into the tenure of Hong Kong's last colonial leader, Chris Patten. Dimbleby treats the reader to a narrative account of the trials and tribulations that Patten faced as he attempted to enact democratic reforms in Great Britain's last colonial jewel. Although one would undoubtedly expect the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to be vociferously opposed to any belated attempt by the British colonial authorities to bequeath a semblance of democracy on Hong Kong, Dimbleby makes the case that Patten's biggest enemies often came from within his own government. Dimbleby's revelations that selected British cabinet and Foreign Office officials shamelessly sought to downgrade the importance of Hong Kong and sacrifice Patten's proposed reforms on the altar of commercial relations with the PRC, resulted in Dimbleby being investigated by the Foreign Office for possible receipt of secret intelligence materials. Dimbleby was cleared of these allegations, but the vast array of insider information that Dimbleby amassed for this book strengthens the strident arguments that Dimbleby advances. Only a handful of participants in *The Last Governor* emerge with their reputations unscathed. Hong Kong's local and international business elite is portrayed as willing supplicants in the PRC's efforts to scale back personal and political liberties after Hong Kong's reversion to PRC sovereignty, a position easily enforced by PRC threats to their commercial interests. Martin Lee and Emily Lau, two of Hong Kong's leading democracy advocates, are portrayed as actually weakening Patten's push for democratic reforms through their uncompromising approach. The various representatives of the PRC are painted as unbending ideologues with little appreciation of Hong Kong's way of life. Dimbleby is most critical of

the British officials, past and present, who acted to either inadvertently or deliberately sabotage Patten's governorship. Most prominent on this list is Sir Percy Cradock, Great Britain's lead negotiator in the 1984 Joint Declaration and former Ambassador to the PRC. Cradock comes off as a modern-day Neville Chamberlain, willing to cut a bad deal with an unsavory power for the sake of diplomatic expediency. Cradock compounded this error by working both privately and publically to weaken Patten's political position and policies. Dimbleby also argues that the Cradock mentality had infected the entire Foreign Office and selected members of John Major's cabinet, who worked to undercut Patten and sell-out Hong Kong in favor of better commercial relations with the PRC. The greatest strength of *The Last Governor* is also its greatest weakness. While such open access to Patten gives this book the necessary dramatic propulsion, it also strikes the reader as serving as Patten's mouthpiece. While Dimbleby does downgrade Patten for underestimating the challenges he was to face as Governor, Dimbleby's portrayal of Patten as the lonely David fighting against the multi-headed Goliath seems to diminish the numerous allies Patten needed to help him accomplish the limited reforms he was able to enact. Dimbleby could have also delved deeper into the political rationale behind the PRC's bargaining position and policies regarding Hong Kong. *The Last Governor* is highly recommended reading for anyone interested in Hong Kong, Chinese, or British affairs and to readers interested in how bureaucratic politics affects international diplomacy. Dimbleby's prose is brisk and should easily captivate and entrance the reader. Keep in mind that this is not an academic tome, so Dimbleby's point of view is repeatedly expressed without reservation or apology.

If you were hoping that a renowned journalist such as Dimbleby might have made some attempt to give a balanced and unbiased account of the unique historical events leading up to the handover of Hong Kong, you'll be sorely disappointed with this book. Instead, the book seems entirely written from the point of view of Patten and his office. Patten's political opponents in the pro-China/business camp are frequently dismissed as "affecting" to represent the people, when in reality they could be said to be at least as representative as Patten himself (who was appointed, don't forget, by a foreign government with no participation of the local electorate). In fact the irony that Britain failed to give any form of representative government in the 150 years prior to the handover, but yet felt the need to chastise the Chinese for acting in the same way seems completely lost in this account. There is no exploration of Patten's political opponents, beyond the cursory dismissal of their agendas. There is also no detectable criticism of Patten at all, even though he clearly failed in several areas - most noticeably with his incredibly gauche handling of the relationship with the Chinese. So while at times

this book is an interesting and revealing account of the relationship between Patten and Downing Street, it singularly fails to give a rounded account of the political situation at the time in Hong Kong.

This book is one of the best books about the history and political development of HK. It not only gives a brief but interesting historical outline at the beginning of the book, it also traces the development of HK politics. What the governors before Chris Patten did and what have been changed since the arrival of Patten. It also outlines lots of power struggles between the governor and the ministers in Britain and how Patten dealt with them. For sure the relations between the governor and the Prime Minister John Major is a key factor contributing to the "success" of the governor. Of course one would have no doubt about that the close relationship between the governor and the writer, Jonathan Dimbleby, who followed Patten to come to HK and spent several years with him, which does enable him to access some crucial but secret matters that are not easily accessed by other journalists. Being a HK citizen, reading the book enables me not just to know the past better but it also enriches me about the situations of HK at that time. Reading it is just like passing through the history once again, with all those political arguments between China and both Patten and Britain reappearing in real life. Another interesting thing about the book is that it also touches lots of the everyday lives of the ordinary people living in HK, how did they feel about the political arguments and what did they plan to do after the handover of China. This makes the book more lively. This book is definitely a book that students of history/Political Science/HK Studies should read.

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