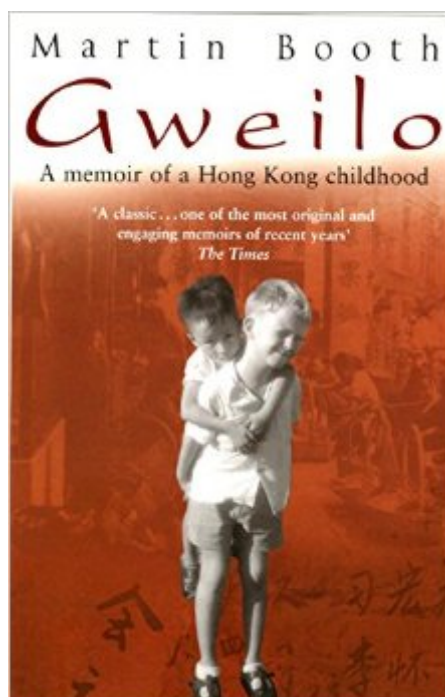


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Gweilo: Memories Of A Hong Kong Childhood



Synopsis

Evocative, funny and full of life, this is a beautifully observed childhood memoir of growing up in colonial Hong Kong in the 1950s. As an inquisitive seven-year-old, Martin Booth found himself with the whole of Hong Kong at his feet when his father was posted there in the early 1950s.

Unrestricted by parental control, he had free access to hidden corners of the colony normally closed to a Gweilo, a 'pale fellow' like him. Befriending rickshaw coolies and local stallholders, he learned Cantonese, sampled delicacies such as boiled water beetles and one-hundred-year-old eggs, and participated in colourful festivals. He even entered the forbidden Kowloon Walled City, wandered into the secret lair of the Triads and visited an opium den. Along the way he encountered a colourful array of people, from the plink plonk man with his dancing monkey to Nagasaki Jim, a drunken child molester, and the Queen of Kowloon, the crazed tramp who may have been a member of the Romanov family. Shadowed by the unhappiness of his warring parents, a broad-minded mother who, like her son, was keen to embrace all things Chinese, and a bigoted father who was enraged by his family's interest in 'going native', Martin Booth's compelling memoir is a journey into Chinese culture and an extinct colonial way of life that glows with infectious curiosity and humour.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As a long-term Hongkong resident and sentimental fool, I'm almost bound to say that Gweilo and my adopted home are utter magic. Sadly, I live in London right now and, like me, those with a tendency to homesickness will probably read Gweilo and immediately want to get on the first Cathay

flight home. For Gweilo is a terrific story with intimate glimpses of Hongkong in the fifties seen through the eyes of a curious little boy called Martin and his ill-suited, warring parents. It gets five stars just for the author's enviable ability to conjure up unforgettable images in a splendid pacy style. 'Memories of a Hong Kong Childhood' is only half memories though, with much of it reading like a novel. Yet the plot is extremely simple; young boy and open-minded mother have the life-changing experience of leaving post-war Blighty for somewhere exotic while insecure, racist father does everything in his power to undermine their attempts to fit in with the locals and learn something new. An eventful tug of war between cultures and enlightenment, it will undoubtedly invite empty-headed complaints from the usual suspects that these are the memories of a privileged set that lived in a world far above the toil and filth of the great unwashed. But, as always, this would miss the point. Gweilo is a celebration of life through the eyes of a little boy, unburdened by guilt or irony. In fact, somewhat perversely, the book's only real weak point is Booth's revelling in Daddy-bashing. Even though the tales of Pop's sycophantic attempts to ape the naval officers he would never become are hilarious, it is worth remembering that both mother and boy might never have had their opportunity were it not for Booth senior.

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