



# Gweilo: Memories of a Hong Kong Childhood

*Martin Booth*

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## **Gweilo: Memories of a Hong Kong Childhood** Martin Booth

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.

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