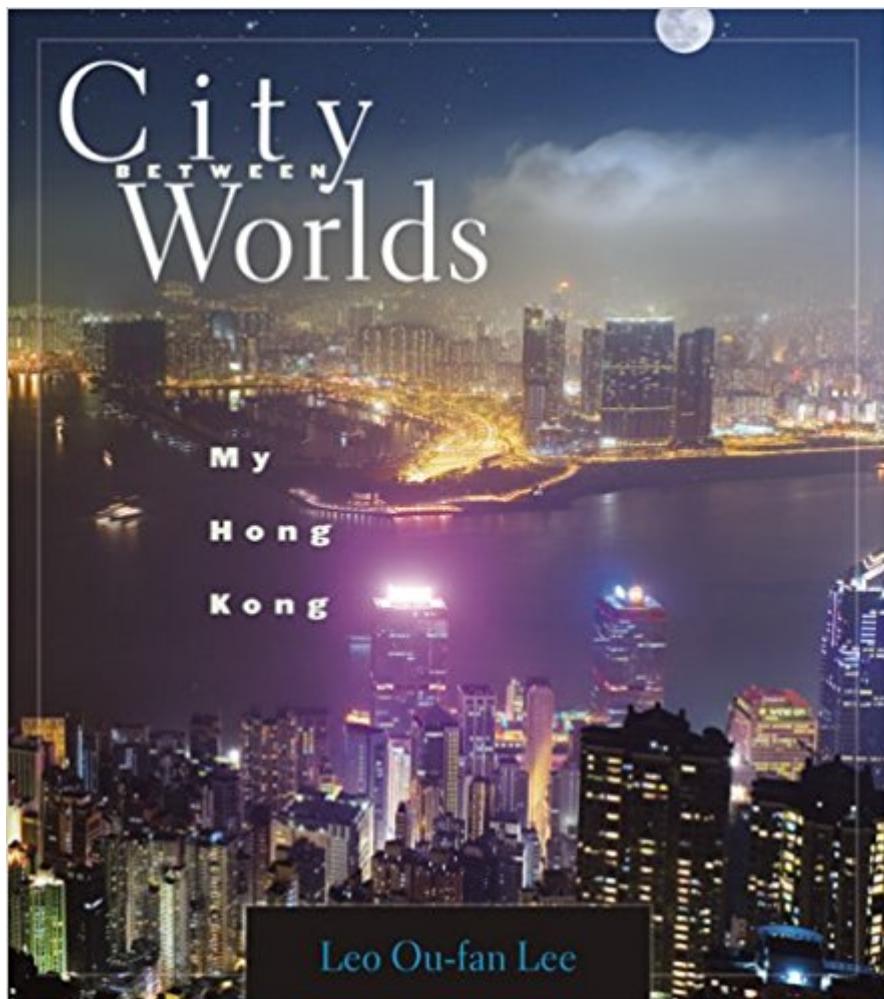


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# City Between Worlds: My Hong Kong



## Synopsis

Hong Kong is perched on the fault line between China and the West, a Special Administrative Region of the PRC. Leo Ou-fan Lee offers an insider's view of Hong Kong, capturing the history and culture that make his densely packed home city so different from its generic neighbors. The search for an indigenous Hong Kong takes Lee to the wet markets and corner bookshops of congested Mong Kok, remote fishing villages and mountainside temples, teahouses and noodle stalls, Cantonese opera and Cantopop. But he also finds the "cereal" Hong Kong in a maze of interconnected shopping malls, a jungle of high-rise residential towers, and the neon glow of Chinese-owned skyscrapers in the Central Business District, where land development, global trade, capital accumulation, consumerism, and free-market competition trump every value "except family."

Lee illuminates the relationship between Hong Kong's geography and its colonial experience, revisiting colonial life on the secluded Peak, in the opium-filled godowns along the harborfront, and in crowded, plague-infested tenements. He examines, with a critic's eye, the "Hong Kong story" in film and fiction: romance in the bars and brothels of Wan Chai, crime in the walled city of Kowloon, ennui on the eve of the 1997 handover. Whether viewed from Tsing Yi Bridge or the deck of the Star Ferry, from Victoria Peak or Lion Rock, Hong Kong sparkles here in all its multifaceted complexity, a city forever between worlds.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A rich and fascinating introduction to the life and cultural history of Hong Kong, *City Between Worlds* will add considerable depth, excitement, and, dare I say, glamour to the material available to

readers interested in learning something about Hong Kong beyond a guide to the usual tourist traps.

Leo Lee draws on his knowledge of Hong Kong's literary, film, and popular culture, along with his personal experiences, to make these places imaginatively inhabited by the past, and by a people who continue to draw on the city's multifaceted history. (Meaghan Morris, Professor of Cultural Studies, Lingnan University (Hong Kong))

A decade after it was handed back by the British to the Chinese, Hong Kong continues to occupy a unique space where China and the West appear to come together rather seamlessly. In this book, Leo Ou-fan Lee goes in search of the "real" Hong Kong and reveals a remarkable city and its multiple identities--the indigenous, the colonial, the modern. A must read for anyone planning to visit and explore this multifaceted city. (Businessworld 2007-12-28)

Anecdotes and vignettes pepper Lee's book. Yet this is no elegiac history of a colony-that-was; rather, his gentle, personal musings read more like a declaration of love for a city full of contradictions...Lee takes the reader on a ramble through Hong Kong, starting at Pedder Street and ending in the New Territories. His stance is that of the flâneur chronicling the life of a beloved city. (Didi Kirsten Tatlow South China Morning Post 2008-05-11)

Uncertainty and transience is part of [Hong Kong's] character and in *City Between Worlds* Leo Ou-fan Lee uses a variety of techniques--travelogue, revisionist history, cultural deconstruction, and personal essay--to pin down what he calls this "œconfusion and contradiction" • while uncovering the deep communal roots that often go unnoticed by outside commentators...*City Between Worlds* balances probing intellectual analysis, fierce criticism, and gentle warmth, all imbued with the frustrated love any city dweller will immediately recognize as the elusive grasp to define where one lives. (Michael Buening PopMatters 2008-06-20)

This sparkling and sometimes profound work is a guidebook in the best sense. As Lee glides up the world's longest escalator in central Hong Kong, he says something interesting at every stage...This is a genuinely felt, well-informed book. (Jonathan Mirsky Times Literary Supplement 2009-01-09)

Assuming the double-identity of archaeologue and flaneur, Mr. Lee mixes a wealth of allusions and historical research with an intimate understanding of Hong Kong's lived culture and recent political developments. The resulting peripatetic narrative takes a freely interpretive look at the city's past and culture, as the reader follows Mr. Lee's explications across Hong Kong's map, from old red-light Wan Chai to modern-day Central Business District and Tsim Sha Tsui.

Refreshingly, Mr. Lee focuses on "local" Hong Kong...It would be the greatest testament to Mr. Lee's loving, rigorous reflection on his adopted home, if in another 10 years he is forced to write a new book to answer the questions that face a Hong Kong taking the first step down the road to self rule. (Paul Mozur Far Eastern Economic Review 2009-01-01)

[Lee's] observations, illuminated by his insightful readings of Shanghai as well as his experiences at the Chinese University of Hong Kong,

also draw intelligent connections between society and urban form and literature and film, including both local and foreign observers...An extremely well-illustrated volume. (G. W. McDonogh Choice 2009-03-01)[An] excellent book about the island city...Lee knows and loves this place, which translates as "fragrant harbor." He takes the reader through the streets and explains the history, the culture and the sociological significance of the city. Travelers wanting to discover the essence of Hong Kong will find this rich and well-written book better than any conventional guide. (Bruce Elder Sydney Morning Herald 2009-07-04)

Leo Ou-fan Lee is Professor Emeritus of Chinese Literature at Harvard University and Professor of Humanities at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

The good:Lee's writing style is clear and fast-moving for the most part. There is a good balance between written content and pictures. Lee does a reasonably good job trying to avoid openly taking sides or falling for romantic narratives. The bad:Lee's decades in academia come through too clearly. While he says that he will avoid abstract theory, he utilises it frequently. This comes through in his use of abstract terminology such as "post-place" without explaining what he actually means. His grasp on Hong Kong history is superficial and out-dated. This wasn't a bad book, but it was deeply flawed. Read it along with other works such as Steve Tsang's "A Modern History of Hong Kong", Martin Booth's "Gweilo" and Austin Coates' "Macao and the British, 1637-1842" for a broader perspective.

This is a fantastic book! For someone who grew up in Hong Kong and spent many years there working in the media scene, I have to say that Leo Ou-fan Lee's account of the city is excellent, very well researched and well-written. I would highly recommend this book to those serious in uncovering Hong Kong's history.

City Between Worlds is not a travel book; it is much more. Its author, Leo Ou-fan Lee, is a long-time resident of Hong Kong who appreciates the multiple facets of the city and understands that Hong Kong means quite different things to different groups of people. First, says Lee, there is the Hong Kong from the perspective of a native, someone who has grown up there and experienced it as the context for everyday life. Then there is the expat Hong Kong, the city to which thousands come to work in its robust finance center, and which drew the European powers of old to colonize the island for trade. The English created the third, colonial Hong Kong, yet another face of the city and one

that, although disappearing, still retains a hold on the imaginations of many. Finally, there is the fourth Hong Kong, an emerging urban and global consciousness that encompasses and transcends all three of the other perspectives. This is, largely, the lens through which Lee reveals Hong Kong to his readers, "voicing opinions, wherever possible, on behalf of a Chinese community whose members have not chosen to write about their city in English. It is for the views of these Cantonese speakers that I purchased this book, as I feel a need to learn a bit more about Hong Kong than what the city presents to the casual tourist or career-focused expat. I am looking forward to spending two months in Hong Kong this summer with a group of graduate students who will be doing field research. I believe that our experience of the city will be enriched by Lee's book, which gives a much broader view of Hong Kong than most of the other books currently available. I have only one criticism of *City Between Worlds*, which is that it tends to present a rather rosier picture of some aspects of Hong Kong society than might be warranted. The precarious situation of foreign domestic helpers, for instance, is not mentioned and there is even a photograph of these workers captioned "Filipino maids gather under the HSBC on Sundays to share food and friendship." No mention of the fact that these workers are often forced to be out of their homes every Sunday because they "live-in" and their employers want to exclude the help from traditional "family day" activities. Maids find themselves on the street with no place to go other than open public gathering places.

The wonderful photo of Hong Kong/Victoria Harbor on the jacket is nice, however, the majority of this book is words, words, and, more words, over 300 pages worth--even if this is a "memoir" of the author, it doesn't take 300 words plus. It lacks photos, it should have more photos of Hong Kong and its sights, and, the pages are in matte finish, not glossy. Plus, the book's a square shape and not that big, only 8 1/2" lengthwise by 7 3/4" widthwise--there's no panoramic photos of Hong Kong within this book. I did like the detailed maps in the back, but, if you're wanting more big, huge, photos, this book is not for you.

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