



City of Darkness: Life in Kowloon Walled City

Ian Lambot , Greg Girard (Illustrator)

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Girard and Lambot spent four years exploring the notorious Walled City of Kowloon (Hong Kong), before its final clearance in 1992. With over 320 photographs, 32 extended interviews, and essays on the City's history and character, this reprint is not only an informative glimpse of a now vanished landmark but a sensitive and penetrating portrait of a unique community.

City of Darkness: Life in Kowloon Walled City Details

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From Reader Review *City of Darkness: Life in Kowloon Walled City* for online ebook

Tam says

Kowloon Walled City: a remarkable amount of industry against a backdrop of seedy urban despair. A gorgeous book.

Aurora Shele says

It is a really interesting book. I got fascinated by the story of Kowloon since I first heard of it. The pictures and the interviews do it justice and they satisfy my curiosity. Wish I could visit it. :)

Polackio says

If you can find a copy, buy it. A lavish photojournalistic record of the last four years (or so) of the Walled City of Kowloon before it was demolished, *City of Darkness* is a mesmerizing glimpse into a world that only existed for the briefest of moments in reality. The Kowloon that Greg Girard knew was only one of many Walled Cities that stood in that spot. There is a brief, but illustrative history of the site at the front of the book accompanied by historic photos. Most of it is just background to help the reader make sense of how a place like the Walled City could possibly exist (in communist China no less). The personal stories of select inhabitants told throughout the rest of the book provide a unique perspective into a way of life that would seem baffling to most outsiders, making the Walled City seem almost normal when examined up close, but always alluding to the uniqueness of this place and the conditions that created it.

The photos are striking. The stories are illuminating. The subject is utterly unique and now completely gone (paved over with a shopping mall and rec center). It's an extremely hard book to find. I searched through rare booksellers both on and offline for over two years before finding a copy at a price I could afford. I only knew of the book because William Gibson referenced it in the acknowledgements for his novel, *Idoru*. But it was worth the effort and every penny spent. Find this book if you can.

Kate says

Fascinating.

I should also say: Thank goodness for interlibrary loan. I read an article and saw some of the pictures from this book online (www.messynessychic.com via facebook) but I wouldn't have been able to read the whole thing without the cooperating libraries. YAY!

Yasmine says

Absolutely excellent. Girard is a skillful photographer. He manages to capture the humanity, the tightness, the dreariness of the Walled City. It's worth the price, and worth finding. I highly recommend it.

Margaret says

Wonderful book. I was inspired to read it after a visit to Kowloon Walled City Park which is now part of a public garden in Kowloon. It was so beautiful and so quiet I wanted to know more about the "den of thieves, prostitutes and drug addicts" I'd heard about. By reading this book I have discovered the other unexpected side: the resourcefulness of the ordinary people who lived there. And the photographs are revealing and at the same time stimulate the imagination.

Dozo says

Beautiful, sensitive and wonderfully put together mix of photos, interviews and journalistic articles on the Kowloon walled city. Possibly the best book ever on Hong Kong.

Domitille says

Truly fascinating.

This book describes Kowloon Walled City which is a district in Hong Kong. The Walled City was destroyed in 1993. It had its own laws, and many traffics took place there, it was the triads kingdom, and many refugees used to live inside. But it's for its incredible architecture that the place is the most interesting. Imagine a huge block, fourteen storeys high sometimes, and conceived by no architect whatsoever. With the years, corridors, floors were added. Inside, you cannot see the light of day. People lived in community, children playing on the rooftop. The place is amazing to the eye (look at some pictures if you can) even though it was probably unsanitary, it's like a great human ant-hill greatly depicted in this book.

C. says

Love the photos. Love the stories. It's an amazing book which captures a part of Hong Kong so few of us really know or remember. And the amazing photos! This is a worthy tribute to the people who once lived in that walled city.

The book does cost a terrifying fortune, but I was lucky enough to persuade my parents to get it for me for Christmas. :D Definitely worth it, for me anyway, since I was and am deeply fascinated by the place. And did I mention the beautiful photos? I especially love one of a Chinese herbal doctor. He looked old, in his

seventies, and he was sitting at his bed. But he was awfully tall, and sat ramrod straight. He was not someone you would mess with. The reader is offered a glimpse of his proud dignity, his fierceness, and a glimpse of the many years he had witnessed. I was immediately captivated. I have never seen a photo where the portrait looks back so strongly.

Veronica says

This is a very in depth set of interviews and articles written on one of the most mysterious/misunderstood locations in Hong Kong. I read the Chinese translated version of this book which likely is based off the revisited version published in 2014. The original was actually done in English. Through various interviewed articles, a side of old Hong Kong is shown that is likely not well known to the world. This is a long read but kept me captivated to finish in less than a day.

Ann Klefstad says

A dazzling account of a real place that's stranger than anything one could make up. There's a forward by William Gibson, who used the idea of this place in his book "Visible Light."

Jack says

If you can find a copy of this book and can convince someone to let you paw through it, do so.

It's long out of print, collectible, and fragile due to the fact it's softcover. Did I mention it's expensive? It is, but oh, is it worth it!

I put off buying a copy for many years because it was just too expensive for a book I couldn't look at first -- and whose value I'd damage just by opening it. However, after reading Wikipedia's small section on Kowloon Walled City I was so intrigued that I knew I had to buy it.

I debated a long time about pulling the cellophane cover off. Had to end up doing it after a few drinks. Once I opened it, I realized it was everything I'd hoped it would be.

Understand, Kowloon was destroyed several years ago. It no longer exists. No real maps were ever made of the place and the most complete record of it exists in these pages. It's as close as you can get to visiting the city without somehow going back in time.

And what is Kowloon Walled City? It was 6.5 acre piece of property where regulation was non-existent and the population built and built and built until it was a solid block of a building fourteen stories high with absolutely no planning or design. Everything went on within its walls and it was a fully functioning city outside of Hong Kong. Sort of a city state, sort of a country, sort of an anarchist commune, and completely unlike anything built before or since.

This book is the only key to unlocking the understanding of what it was to live and breathe within those

walls. Of course it gets five stars, how could I give it anything else?

Bettie? says

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china> architecture without an architect. Gormenghast chinese style.

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summer 2013

Fantastic, hypnotising, just imagine living there...

Luckily it was pulled down early 90s

The photography is so very good. 5*

P.H.G. Haslam says

A glorious book that gave me a very positive message about humans, and plenty of inspiration in life. These are stories of people stretched, of people on the very edge; in a no-man's-land between British Hong Kong and China.

Some of the photographs in here so achingly beautiful, I couldn't help but stare. Recommended to everybody.

Tso William says

When the camera takes a photo of a moving person, it captures that specific moment of the person. The face will be blurred with a white haze, almost like a halo, as if there is two faces. If he is walking or moving, then similarly, the motion of this fraction of second and the next becomes indistinct like an amoeba during its asexual reproduction.

This book is like that camera. It captures the Kowloon Walled City in her twilight. The name speaks for itself. "Kowloon Walled City" is a city without the wall because it was already demolished by the Japanese during the Second World War to build the airport. By the time Ian Lambot and his crew arrived, the city is where the (unlicensed) dentists and (unregulated) factories established themselves to take advantages of the low rents and loose regulations (if any) there. It was almost an anti-climax because the triad, according to the inhabitants, were almost gone as well. As the demolition plan was announced, the people, with little bargaining power, can only hope for the best from the government.

It was unusual how this little space housed how such variety of people. People produced, among other

things, fish balls and roasted pork. Other manufactured rulers, textiles and even rubber plumbers. Contrary to popular belief, the dentists were not totally unlicensed. Some of them had a Chinese qualification but it was not recognized by the Hong Kong authority, while some received training under the old apprentice system and so did not sit for the formal examination. One person raised pigeons on the roof, not for consuming them but for long-distance competition. The inhabitants had no qualm in living side by side with those factories. May be they accepted them as a matter of fact since the rents and housing prices within the city were much lower.

As there was no planning whatsoever and shops, factories and residence intermixed, a distinct kind of architecture began to emerge. It was architecture with innumerable architects. The developers built their own buildings, being oblivious to the neighboring building. Viewed from the outside, the buildings exhibited no horizontal uniformity, as if they had no relationship. However within them, staircases were often constructed to cross from one building to another. As a result, there was a maze-like structure within city. Moreover, as the buildings were so close together, a child can practically hop from one roof to another.

However each and every single one of those buildings were now demolished. A public park was constructed on the original site. We can only know the city by looking at the photos. As the book consists of interviews, I always wonder the aftermaths of the interviewees. One of the few things I know is that the Kowloon Walled City Kai Fong Association still exists. By chance, I came across it. It was relocated to a humble site near a mall in Wong Tai Sin district.

There is a second edition of this book. This review will be updated after I get hold of that edition.
