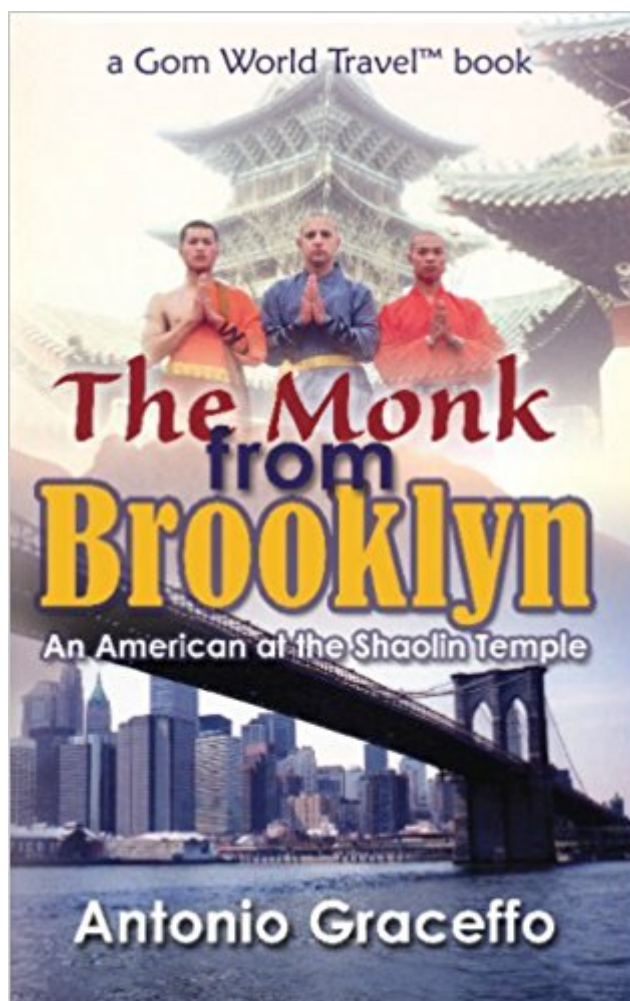


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The Monk From Brooklyn: An American At The Shaolin Temple



Synopsis

Antonio Graceffo was lucky enough to be one of the few, and this is the chronicle of his experience. Antonio has twenty-five years of experience with martial arts, so it is with a knowing eye that he observed the training at the temple. But it is his background that gives him a very unique perspective. An Italian-American from Brooklyn, New York, and a former investment banker, Antonio was educated in some of the best universities that Europe and Asia had to offer. His articles are informative, humorous, and irreverent. He doesn't pull any punches writing about the filthy conditions and the diminished mental capacities of people who spent a lifetime learning to kick, but never bothered to learn to read and write. The title says it all. Put a Chinese-speaking Italian-American, from Brooklyn in the holiest of Buddhist temples, and watch the racial harmony flow.

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Customer Reviews

Ever since the "Kung Fu" t.v. series aired decades ago, Americans have held a starry-eyed,

romanticized view of the Shaolin Temple, the supposed cradle of Chinese kung fu. In this book, Antonio Graceffo, a hard-nosed New-Yorker, gives a detailed account of the time he spent studying kung fu at the legendary Shaolin Temple. Mr. Graceffo's account quickly dispels the fairy tale image many people hold of this place. Using authentic Brooklyn terminology, Mr. Graceffo clearly outlines how many items taken for granted in the West, such as sanitation, electricity, plumbing, and infrastructure are severely curtailed or even absent in other parts of the world. The Shaolin monks themselves are not spared Graceffo's Western skepticism. One learns that the monks' world-renowned martial arts skills have come at the cost of nearly everything else, including education and knowledge of the outside world. If you are looking for elegant, poetic verse, you will not find it in this book. "The Monk from Brooklyn" reads essentially like a travel journal. However, Mr. Graceffo's coarse, occasionally foul language definitely gives the book an air of authenticity. Some of his "fish out of water" experiences are genuinely hilarious. This book is definitely a worthwhile read, especially for those curious about how the customs and assumptions taken for granted in one culture can differ from those one actually finds in another.

Graceffo has his moments, but this book reads like a prolonged griping session. The excerpts I had previously read in martial arts magazines suggested that this would be a wry perspective on the Shaolin experience, but reading the book is tough going. Graceffo finds most of the Chinese people he deals with annoying, and seems to resent their presence. This is somewhat odd since he chose to go there, and it is their country, after all. I would also have expected that his time in Taiwan would have prepared him for some of the attitudes he encountered on the mainland. He chose to live in the school with the students, but then proceeded to detail the experience as an imposition. Of course two alternatives existed: leave, or at least move to some alternative housing. Traveling there without adequate cash reserves seems to have occasioned most of his misery and insecurity, but it was not as if he didn't have the resources. This failure to plan colors much of his perspective for the rest of the book. Some travel writers do a much better job of adapting to circumstances, so much of this reads like an extended experience of culture shock. Not to dispute the author's experiences. I am sure they all happened, but I am not sure the students and many of the people he dealt with deserved some of the criticism they came under here. If you are interested in kungfu, you won't find much here, aside from the author teaching his own brand of Brooklyn 'kungfu'. He was apparently not much impressed with techniques he saw there, and frequently made the observation that the kungfu practiced there wouldn't stand up in a street fight. Other reviewers have stated that this would have been better suited to appear as a magazine article, and I would agree with that. Even as an

article, the gist of this work would probably turn off most readers, except for convicted Sinophobes. One would do better, I think, to read Matthew Polley's "American Shaolin", which does not gloss over the discomforts of life in China or shaolin training, but shows that Polley genuinely seems to have made an effort to bridge the cultural gap, rather than retreating into a fortress mentality. I suppose that goes to say that both books are more about culture shock and how one deals with it, as opposed to being about the martial arts. The other aspect of this book that is somewhat disagreeable is that the author often seems to be touting himself as superior to the Chinese, based upon his income, education, or worldliness. But I often felt as if the author was injecting that persona also to show his readers what a great guy he is. This self-promotion seemed very out-of-place to me, but maybe not to most readers. Still, parts of this book are very amusing and interesting, so it certainly rates a look.

This book is great in all ways! I have seen some other reviews that negatively speak about the author's style of writing and/ don't agree with his outlook on shaolin. I find that ridiculous this is a real account of a real man who journeyed to Shaolin...and this is his specific outlook on the journey. The writing style is none other than a journal/diary where he re-adventures the things he goes through during the day! It's a great book and I was stuck on it until I finished every single page of every diary entry! The author is quite a pessimist and seems to be a more self-defense oriented martial artist but none of that less is semi appealing/understandable/and funny! SO...check out this book for yourself it's great! And for a teenage martial artist who plans to journey to China one day this book was great and VERY INSPIRATIONAL....((If you get a chance check out American Shaolin by Matthew Polley)) Also a great book!!! Happy Reading

Antonio Graceffo's account is entertaining, educational, and emotional. It is the most honest account of the reality of living in China I have encountered. I met Antonio at Shaolin, I had no idea of the ordeals he was going through while training. Anyone who is considering to go live in China, especially in a rural area, should read this book. Nothing can fully prepare you for the experience of actually living nearby the Shaolin Temple, but Antonio's book is as close as it gets.

Very good!

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