

Book Reviews

WILD COLONIAL BOY: TALES OF A KUNG FU COP

BY DAN DOCHERTY

REVIEWED BY MARNIX WELLS

Here is an unvarnished account of a career working in the Far East, namely Hong Kong, while it was still British. Unusually, it is presented in the attractive format of one- or two-page vignettes, with occasional apposite snapshots, ideal for dipping into and savouring at leisure. Having worked in what Dan acknowledges to have been a highly corrupt police force, though ameliorated by a transparent court of law and press, Dan spares no details of his interactions with the social underside. In his own unassuming way, he bares his soul for us. Although written in the first person, the style is as of a birds-eye view, objective but engaging, somewhat like Caesar's *Galle Wars*.

Spiced with the occasional Latin or French tag, we learn of Dan's policing and martial adventures, told in dead-pan manner without fear or favour, not without a touch of laconic humour. He was perhaps a classic example of how Scots often formed the backbone of empire and commonwealth. Coming from a karate grounding, Dan early divined the way forward for his martial interests lay in tai chi. At that time, 1975, this meant training in the Far East under a real master. Having answered an advertisement, he secured employment as a police inspector in the Hong Kong.

There he found what he was looking for in the formidable master Cheng Tinhung, of Wu family tai chi and its nei kung (internal qigong) training. From Cheng's school, in 1976, Dan was to become full-contact champion of Hong Kong, and later Malaysia. Yet, underneath this hard-man image, we get glimpses of a graduate in law, scholar of languages, and a humanitarian with strong sense of Justice. In the 1980s, after the era of Mao and 'Gang of Four', Dan relates how he was finally able to tour the mainland and visit Shaolin, then in almost ruinous state, and other sites of martial heritage.



After the conclusion of Dan's narrative, I would add, from personal experience, Dan went on to found his own UK school of tai chi, host annual tai chi tournaments at Oxford, and successfully hold the chairmanship of the Tai Chi Union for Great Britain over many years until earlier this year. Meanwhile, Dan authored several notable works on the tai chi classics with martial applications for self-defense. In this memoir Dan allows his admirers, and doubtless also critics, to understand a little more about this enigmatic character and appreciate the breadth of his achievements to date.