

**THE EXPATRIATES***By Janice Y.K. Lee*

Viking

\$27.00

ISBN 9780525429470

Published 01/12/2016

Fiction / Popular Fiction

[January 2016](#)

THE EXPATRIATES

Searching for home in Hong Kong

BookPage review by Deborah Donovan

Three American women become ensconced in the cultural *mélange* of Hong Kong's expat community in Janice Y.K. Lee's absorbing, character-driven novel, following 2009's *The Piano Teacher*. The author, who was born and raised in Hong Kong, opens her novel with a spot-on description of that sprawling city's expat contingent—the Chinese, Irish, French, Koreans and Americans—“a veritable UN of fortune-seekers.” They have come for their jobs, or their husbands' jobs; for six months, a year, maybe three years or more. And they have no idea what to expect from their temporary new home.

Mercy, 27, is a Korean-American woman who has been trying to make a “new start” in Hong Kong for three years. She was raised in a cramped apartment in Queens and graduated from Columbia, a “fancy college with

fancy kids who showed her a different world.” She is having trouble finding a steady job and is not yet feeling comfortable in her role as one of the few single expats.

Margaret Reade also arrived three years ago, following her husband, a higher-up with a U.S. multinational. On the surface they are living the enviable, seemingly perfect expat life, but they have suffered a recent loss, and Margaret is finding it nearly impossible to move on.

Hilary and her husband, David, have been in Hong Kong for eight years, and she has been trying to become pregnant ever since their arrival. Her marriage has “cooled into politeness,” but she’s hoping a child might help.

In Hong Kong’s insulated atmosphere, the paths of these three women manage to cross in intricate and unexpected ways. As they tell their stories in alternating chapters, Mercy, Margaret and Hilary become so familiar, the reader seems to have met them before. We know them not just superficially but are privy to their inner thoughts, frustrations and dreams. Like [Jodi Picoult](#) and [Kristin Hannah](#), Lee is a perceptive observer of her compelling characters and brings them vividly to life in this moving novel.