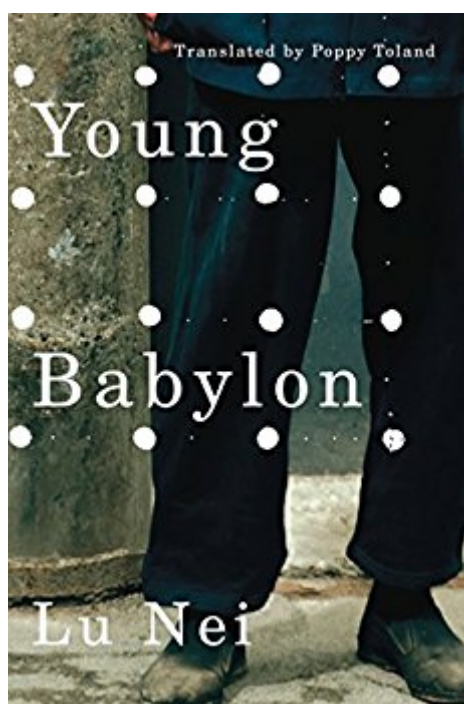


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# Young Babylon



## Synopsis

Knowing nothing more than the working-class life he is born into, headstrong Lu Xiaolu reluctantly starts down the path he is expected to follow. At age nineteen in 1990s China, he feels pressure to follow suit with those around him and takes a job at the town's saccharin factory. Slowly, he adjusts to the bureaucratic factory routine, making the best of the situation by bonding with coworkers, flirting with girls, and refusing to give in completely to the expectations of those around him. As Lu Xiaolu finds his way, a startling portrait of an economically expanding China comes into view; the propaganda of a common goal gives way to a bottom-line system that he sees as indifferent to individual happiness. But thanks to the relationships he develops, Lu Xiaolu decides to fight for the life he wants.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I enjoyed reading this book, though I found it disjointed at times. The story is of a high school graduate entering the labor market in China of the 1990s. He is very self-centered and discouraged by the thought that he is facing a lifetime of meaningless work. His attitude is illustrated by an event early in the book: Everyone runs from their homes when there is an explosion in the nearby

pesticide factory. When he sees an older woman who had been bathing and ran out wearing only her underpants, he thinks it's sad that the first breasts he saw were those of an old woman. Then he thinks that, should he be killed by the explosion, the only breasts he'd ever see would have been those of an old woman. Somehow I never felt I was reading a Chinese book. The book contains many Western phrases such as "nothing to write home about", perhaps the translator is to blame. Political correctness is evident as well. The book contains much raw language - the factory workers discuss everything in graphic or sexual terms, yet suddenly someone is described as being "mentally challenged". I think guys nicknamed Good-Balls, Chicken-Head, or Bad-Ass would have used a more colorful term. The protagonist gradually comes to appreciate the beauties of life, and leaves the drudgery of the factory and his home town behind. I recommend the book, though it could have been better.

I chose a five star rating because it was a 5-star book to me. I don't have the means to travel. And I try to read books about far-away places of any time period. And prefer authors of these books to be from the same country. Young Babylon is a title I am still trying to figure out. Wealthy people are not in this book. The characters are factory workers in the saccharin factory or the formaldehyde factory. Most of the characters are young and not much different than young Americans. For instance wanting to follow the latest fashions. The main character goes from teenager to 30 years old. This book has much humor and much sadness too. I hope the author writes more books available to Americans. This book taught me a lot and took me far-away.

I liked Young Babylon, mostly for its insight into Chinese culture and social differences. There were parts that were a bit too vulgar for me, but I was able to overlook them for the story that was there. Kindle First selections gives me a chance to go out of my comfort zone and explore styles and authors I wouldn't have read otherwise. Young Babylon is certainly a different kind of read. It's not some kind of classic like *The Catcher in the Rye* like the publisher suggests. It's a good story about the coming of age of a young man in industrial China. A lot of people have problems with the vulgarity in this novel. It's a cultural difference as I see it. In America, if you call a butch female coworker a "tiger" or you call a supervisor "Old-Ass" you're looking at an EEO complaint. But you have to realize the rest of the world isn't a politically correct conscious as we are. They only have a state media over there so they don't have the commentators telling them how they should talk and what they should be offended by. It is quite a vulgar book but it was mostly the sex obsession with the protagonist that disturbed me. Just get a girlfriend already. The negative quality of this book is

the repetitiveness and discussion of topics that are out of place. At times the book will introduce a character or subject like you should know all about it and then in the next chapter it will introduce the character or subject in depth. This made the book very hard to read at times and really disturbed the flow. Instead of going into a sidebar to discuss a subject in the middle of a chapter I wished it just got on with the story. Because this was written in a different language I don't know if this is the fault of the editor, a bad translator, or the translator just doing the best with what he had to work with. At the end of the day I'm happy I read Young Babylon, but if it wasn't a Kindle First read I probably wouldn't have sought it out.

Reviewer C. R. Hurst gave a well-written review, with which I completely agree. He said it better than I can - see his review here; <http://goo.gl/0cckXI> This is one of the worst books I have ever read. To give the author the benefit of the doubt, there may be a lot lost in translation or culturally not getting what is supposed to be humorous or entertaining. The book was promoted as a story about breaking free from societal, political, and family expectations to follow one's dreams. It is nothing of the sort. It is a non-stop horrific narrative of daily abuse, degradation, a toxic and dangerous environment, and utter disregard for human life. The main character's closest friendships are violent and abusive, and those are the good parts of his life. There are a few references to his eventual life outside the factory job, but no real detail, and his changed life is still described as living in a filthy, cockroach and rat infested apartment in Shanghai with a girlfriend who doesn't really understand him. There is no breaking free, following of dreams, or any other positive outcome to the story. This is a life of daily violence, filth - both physical and mental, and oppression. I have to wonder if this is an accurate portrayal of life in modern China - if so, it's terrifying. If that's what you want to read about, go for it, just don't expect the story to be as described in the promotional reviews.

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