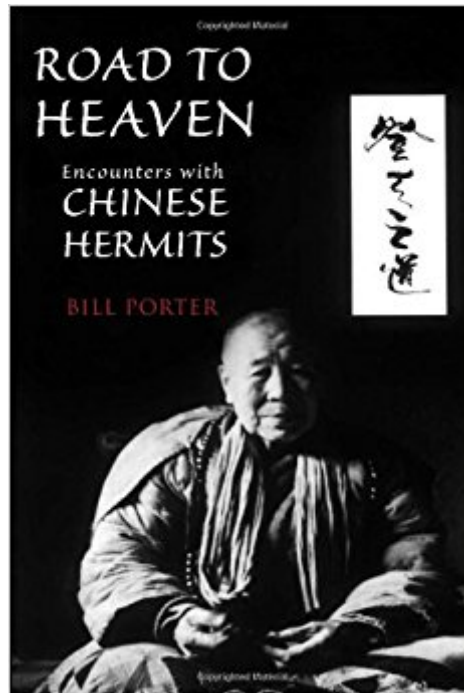




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Road To Heaven: Encounters With Chinese Hermits



Synopsis

In 1989, Bill Porter, having spent much of his life studying and translating Chinese religious and philosophical texts, began to wonder if the Buddhist hermit tradition still existed in China. At the time, it was believed that the Cultural Revolution had dealt a lethal blow to all religions in China, destroying countless temples and shrines, and forcibly returning thousands of monks and nuns to a lay life. But when Porter travels to the Chungnan mountains – the historical refuge of ancient hermits – he discovers that the hermit tradition is very much alive, as dozens of monks and nuns continue to lead solitary lives in quiet contemplation of their faith deep in the mountains. Part travelogue, part history, part sociology, and part religious study, this record of extraordinary journeys to an unknown China sheds light on a phenomenon unparalleled in the West. Porter's discovery is more than a revelation, and uncovers the glimmer of hope for the future of religion in China.

Book Information

Paperback: 220 pages

Publisher: Counterpoint (September 29, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1582435235

ISBN-13: 978-1582435237

Product Dimensions: 0.8 x 6 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 63 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #376,263 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #147 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Ethnic & National > Chinese #212 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Other Eastern Religions & Sacred Texts > Taoism #292 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Eastern > Taoism

Customer Reviews

From 1966 to 1976 the malevolent rage of the Chinese Cultural Revolution struck a devastating blow to all religions in China, destroying countless temples and shrines that had stood for centuries and forcibly returning thousands of monks and nuns to lay life. Bill Porter had been told that the venerable hermetic tradition in China had also succumbed, but he went looking anyway. What he found, Taoist and Buddhist monks and nuns living in huts and caves deep in the mountains of central China, is more than a revelation, it is a glimmer of hope for the future of religion in China.

--This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Porter, a Hong Kong-based writer whose previous books were published under the pen name Red Pine (*The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma*), lived in a Taiwanese monastery for three years in the 1970s and later translated works of some Chinese hermits long admired for their virtue. When travel to China opened up in the late 1980s, Porter began to search for hermits who might have survived under years of communism. His story is unusual, but his "encounters"--actually, brief interviews--produce not subtle observations but statements of gnomic profundity: " . . . the Tao is empty. It can't be explained." Still, Porter showed undeniable bravery as he trekked through the Chungnan Mountains in central China to interview more than 20 male and female hermits. Some hermits are circumspect about politics, having suffered under the Cultural Revolution, while others, like an 85-year-old monk who had lived in a cave for 50 years, are oblivious to the political changes. Porter's historical and literary reflections show sensitivity to his subject, but this book seems aimed only at those interested in such spiritual quests. Some of the photographs are starkly spectacular. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is a great book about Taoist and Buddhist hermits living in the mountains of China after the Cultural Revolution. In 1989, the author trudged the mountains of China searching for hermits, and he found many monks and nuns living a solitary contemplative life. Most of them lived in austere living conditions that would be unbearable for Western culture people to tolerate. But, as long as the hermits could do their daily Taoist or Buddhist practices, then they tolerated the harsh living conditions that they encountered living in the mountains of China. The author interviewed several of the monks and nuns, and the spiritual depth of these devote individuals is profound. After reading this book about the hermit monks and nuns that live on so little, with almost no material conveniences, but yet are so dedicated to the spiritual life; I gained a new understanding of --- SPIRITUAL DEDICATION.--- Also, I am very grateful to the Divine for letting me be born and live in the USA, with all the modern comforts and conveniences that we have in this country.

This book is almost unique, in that there are not many similar accounts. Very few westerners (or, for that matter, Chinese) have ventured into the mountains of far-west China to meet the Buddhist and Taoist hermits there. Bill Porter records their perspectives as they spoke to the author first-hand, in his arduous attempts to locate them even after being told multiple times that they do not exist. His

account includes opinions here and there which Americans should probably heed ("If your roots aren't deep and you practice Zen, you can practice all your life and never get anywhere"--Sheng-lin). Having spent a decade in China with a few visits with similar monks--though without climbing vertical mountains or icy passes--I found I wanted to hear more from these renunciates, and probably less from Porter. But this is a diary of his travels as much as an account of Buddhist thought in its various forms, and deserves to be read by students of modern China.

A story of a Westerner exploring the mysterious hermit lifestyle of the Taoists priests and Buddhists monks. As I was reading through each chapter, each words and paragraphs took my imagination on an appreciative-spiritual journey along with the author and his companions. The reader will travel along side and understand the author's great effort in his search of meanings of the East from traversing through chaotic political difficulties and harsh geographical terrains in order to meet with spiritual masters and their disciples whom dedicated their whole life in finding Truths about Life, soul, spirit, body and mind through material meagerness, seclusion and meditation in deep forests and high mountains; a pleasant read for those who wishes to escape the physical weariness and mundane-ness of society and modern life. Existentially, because of the language barrier, meanings were lost through western linguistic translations, the author didn't fully grasp the concepts of what is eastern-ly spiritual; as science is more of the West and Spirit is of the East.

The book, 'Road to Heaven: Encounters with Chinese hermits' by Bill Porter was a fascinating look, part travelogue, part Chinese history, and part religious exploration of people living in the Ching Ling mountains of China who have survived, pursued, and lived being hermits (whether religious, intellectual, or personal). Mr. Porter, who has learned the Chinese language and lived in Taiwan, and has explored the Chinese mainland with collaborating friends over many years knows his way around the countryside, the politics, the language, and religious history of Taoism and Buddhism in relation to the current Chinese regime. I am glad I stumbled upon this book in my own personal pursuit of hermits and hermit life. I would highly recommend this book to any reader in learning about modern China and the pursuit of religion in today's Chinese culture. Probably the most fascinating interview by Mr. Porter (who interviewed and questioned a number of Chinese hermits on their beliefs and lifestyles besides actually traveling to where they lived or did at one time) was one who lived on a mountain and when during the interview references were being made to Chairman Mao, asked, "Who is this Mao you keep referring to?" A great read!

Wonderful account of 2 early travelers through the hinterlands of China. Their encounters with what was probably the last generation of Taoist hermits is "must" reading. It's a little reminiscent of "The World We Have Lost." Enjoy.

Now I know why there are seekers that practice, for a time, maybe longer, in solitude. Interesting to read about how others practice, from a writer well versed in the language and the culture yet I can relate to, as an American. This book has been translated into Chinese, sans references to police and the CCP politics, that I wish to buy and send as gifts. This book has been so well appreciated that this American has been asked to teach Chinese about their own culture and has been invited to speak to Buddhist monks and nuns about Ch'an (Zen). Be sure to enjoy Bill's unofficial companion book to this "Road to Heaven:..." -- the "Zen Baggage: A Pilgrimage to China". I consider Bill Porter, AKA Red Pine, one of my life's teachers. Thank you, Bill. All his works have helped me to point the way to better enjoy my life, be more grateful, and more present in balancing my time with family, career, karate and zazen, mountain biking, and surfing (yes, I am all over the place, I know). This morning, after sitting meditation, zazen, at our zendo, Paul R. and I were chatting about this fine book and the fascinating "Zen Baggage" as the birds chirped in the court yard, the cool wind ruffled the branches, and the glimmer of dawn accented the smiles. May the grace of God, the only thing free in this life, bless you with enjoyment, and, perhaps, insights from this good book, "The Road to Heaven." Sincerely

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