



## Zen Baggage: A Pilgrimage to China

*Red Pine , Red Pine*

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## **Zen Baggage: A Pilgrimage to China** Red Pine , Red Pine

In the spring of 2006, Bill Porter traveled through the heart of China, from Beijing to Hong Kong, on a pilgrimage to sites associated with the first six patriarchs of Zen. *Zen Baggage* is an account of that journey. He weaves together historical background, interviews with Zen masters, and translations of the earliest known records of Zen, along with personal vignettes. Porter's account captures the transformations taking place at religious centers in China but also the abiding legacy they have somehow managed to preserve. Porter brings wisdom and humor to every situation, whether visiting ancient caves containing the most complete collection of Buddhist texts ever uncovered, enduring a six-hour Buddhist ceremony, searching in vain for the ghost in his room, waking up the monk in charge of martial arts at Shaolin Temple, or meeting the abbess of China's first Zen nunnery. Porter's previously published *Road to Heaven: Encounters with Chinese Hermits* has become recommended reading at Zen centers and universities throughout America and even in China (in its Chinese translation), and *Zen Baggage* is sure to follow suit.

## **Zen Baggage: A Pilgrimage to China Details**

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## From Reader Review **Zen Baggage: A Pilgrimage to China** for online ebook

### **James Allen says**

Zen Baggage is one of my favorite books of all time.

A Zen Buddhist travel memoir. Bill Porter, aka Red Pine, travels China and visits the temples associated with the Six Patriarchs of Zen. Interesting background information is provided on the patriarchs and their lives.

The abbots, temple managers, monks, nuns, and lay people Porter encounters throughout China are as interesting as the patriarchs themselves.

It took time for me to get through this book because I looked up more information on the people and places mentioned in it. I took copious notes and will expand on them as my research continues.

If you are interested in Zen or China, this book is sure to please.

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### **Michael says**

I have a number of Bill Porter's translations. These include his collection of the poems of Han Shan (Cold Mountain) and his translation of The Platform Sutra. Porter's translations are clear and easy to understand. In his translation works, he seems to be able to convey the poetry and complexity of his subject at the same time.

*Zen Baggage* is an entirely different work as it is his account of his trip to China to visit sites of historic significance in the lives of the Zen Patriarchs of China. His account of his travels is told in a relaxed and clear style. He doesn't gloss over the difficulties and oddities of travel in and around China. Porter is able to use his visits to different sites to delve into the history of Zen Buddhism in China and does so in a lively, informative style. It is almost more of a conversation than a lecture in history. But his descriptions of and his interactions with the people he meets, especially the new Buddhist monks rebuilding the infrastructure of Buddhism in China, are the most remarkable part of the book. It is evident that Buddhism in the PRC is rebuilding itself into a lively and meaningful institution for the lives of Chinese people. At the same time, it has to adapt to the realities of the single-party Communist state. This is not a political book, but given the realities of the PRC, watching how individuals are able to manage and navigate those tensions is interesting and informative.

Overall, a very good book for someone interested in China and Buddhism.

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### **John Ellison says**

A very interesting travelogue/memoir. A great way to pick up some Chinese and Zen history along the way.

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### **John says**

Go all the way to 10th century China carrying a cell phone, riding a bus, drinking tea, getting cold wet and tired...Go all the way! Travelling with Red Pine is so much fun and then he throws in his vast knowledge of Chinese Buddhism and literature, especially poetry. I hang on his footnotes. This book is the next best thing to travelling China with Red Pine. What an exceeding generous host to a world very far away and hard to reach. Only a few have pass through and fewer yet come back and share the tale.

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### **Peter says**

This is an idiosyncratic book of the authors travel in China doing homage to and visiting Chinese Zen Patriarch's temples and monasteries. A very honest account of the the inside and outside journey with a bit of Zen and poetry thrown in. I give it 5 stars for its true humor, its honesty and contradictions and its insights into both Chinese Zen teaching and contemporary China. No doubt there is a a bit of historical discussion that did not interest me but the rest was enough.

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### **J.M. Rosenberger says**

A very interesting book. You get to see the world of Zen through the eyes of Red Pine. It's full of characters and places and artifacts that will surely excite you, with several touching and revelatory stories about the author and others intertwined. The end is especially moving. Check it out if you feel inclined!

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### **Larry Smith says**

This book is expertly written in a pleasing personal journal style that bring you along for the journey through modern China as our author-guide searches out the remaining Zen temples and monasteries of the country. Red Pine (Bill Porter)is one of the finest contemporary translators of classic and diverse Chinese literature. Only here he is a fellow traveler giving us intimate details and historical background without once sounding distant and academic. We share the travails of travel with him as well as the wonderful surprises both in nature and people. The writing is complemented by Porter's photos from his travels, and though somewhat smudgy, they authenticate the sense of being there. Porter is as likely to spend a paragraph on the taxi driver as he would on the temple's leader. It's a kind of Zen everyman approach that quietly instructs. Porter himself makes no attempt to instruct us, only shares what he finds and senses.

Here's a sample of his style while visiting a Buddhist temple in northern China: "The second sit lasted seventy-five minutes, which was not so fine. The last fifteen minutes were agonizing, and I wondered how, since my legs were completely numb, they could be the source of so much pain. Once the evening meditation ended and feeling returned to my legs, I walked onto the road that led back to the hostel. The night was pitch black, but I decided not to use my flashlight. I simply followed the river of stars between the trees on either side of the road. There weren't that many, but the ones I could see were as big as fireflies."

If you can slow down to take it in, it's a highly enjoyable read and journey that this book of Zen takes us on. If not, well then, you've missed it.

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### **Todd Mayville says**

I really enjoyed this book. My full review of it is here: <http://www.elephantjournal.com/2009/0...>

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### **Eric Shaffer says**

This travel narrative is excellent and personal writing of the author's travels through China visiting the places significant to the first six patriarchs of Zen. The flashes of contemporary life in China as the extensive historical background was a brisk mixture that maintained my attention. I recommend this book, too, to all of those who want to know more about the nature of the man who is responsible for so many fine translations of Chinese literature and religious texts. If a reader is simply looking for a change of pace from the familiar travelogue or non-fiction, this book will also be a bracing wind from the mountain. Read this one.

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### **Angela says**

I just couldn't get into this book so I never finished it. The print was way too small and there were too many Chinese names and words to begin with that made the reading not flow for me. Just not interesting enough from the get go - so its a no go.

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### **Dinah says**

Reading this for the book club, but I'm not sure if I'm going to be able to finish it, it's mind-numbingly boring so far

Update: Gave up and decided I won't finish it. I thought the subject would be interesting, but the style is too rambling and unfocused for me.

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### **Adelino Almeida says**

A rather dry travelogue that will interest those that feel some affinity for Zen and its history. Bill Porter is one of the best (and certainly the most unassuming) translators of Chan writings of our times, and this book is essential reading for those interested gathering a glimpse of Chan as it is once again gaining popularity in China

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### **Carolyn says**

Another fine book from Bill Porter, guide to things obscure(d) in China. This is his knowledgeable memoir of his adventurous pilgrimage to temples and stupas associated with the first six patriarchs of Zen in China. He explains ideas and attitudes, lineages and curious cultural tidbits along the way. The bonus is the epilogue wherein he tells his own tale.

In Yunmen he met a doctoral student from Italy who was researching Empty Cloud. They travel together for

a portion of the journey. In a perfect world, the book would have included transcripts of their conversations which were sure to have been interesting.

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### **Dan says**

Bizarrely. It's a topic that I enjoyed reading about, and learned a fair amount, which is the only reason it gets three stars, at the same time, the author's writing style is monotone and dragging. Ironically, one of his biggest complaints as he travels about China is that the monks and abbots he meet just drone on and on about their topics. That pretty much describes his style as he just keeps flogging on. Every chapter follows the same formula - he seeks out a bus to get where he's going next, he describes getting to the bus station, getting on the bus, the bus ride, the arrival at his destination, negotiating for a ride to the next temple, pleading to meet the head guy at wherever he is, a litany of how much tea and coffee he drinks, getting tired of listening to whomever he's there to talk to, retiring to his room where he takes a bath, reads and writes in his journal, sleeps, usually poorly, and wakes up the next day to the next chapter and a repeat of the same.

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### **Karen says**

I found it fascinating to get a travelogue picture of the "real" China, from a clearly experienced traveler to that country. Not just any travels, but to buddhist monasteries and temples, places connected to the development of buddhism in China. I loved hearing about the ruggedness of the travels. This author, in true zen style, includes all the details of daily life. Sometimes I don't care to know that taking a "dump" (his word) was the highlight of his morning, but I do like hearing about the chilly bus rides across icy mountain roads and the dust of northern interior China.

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