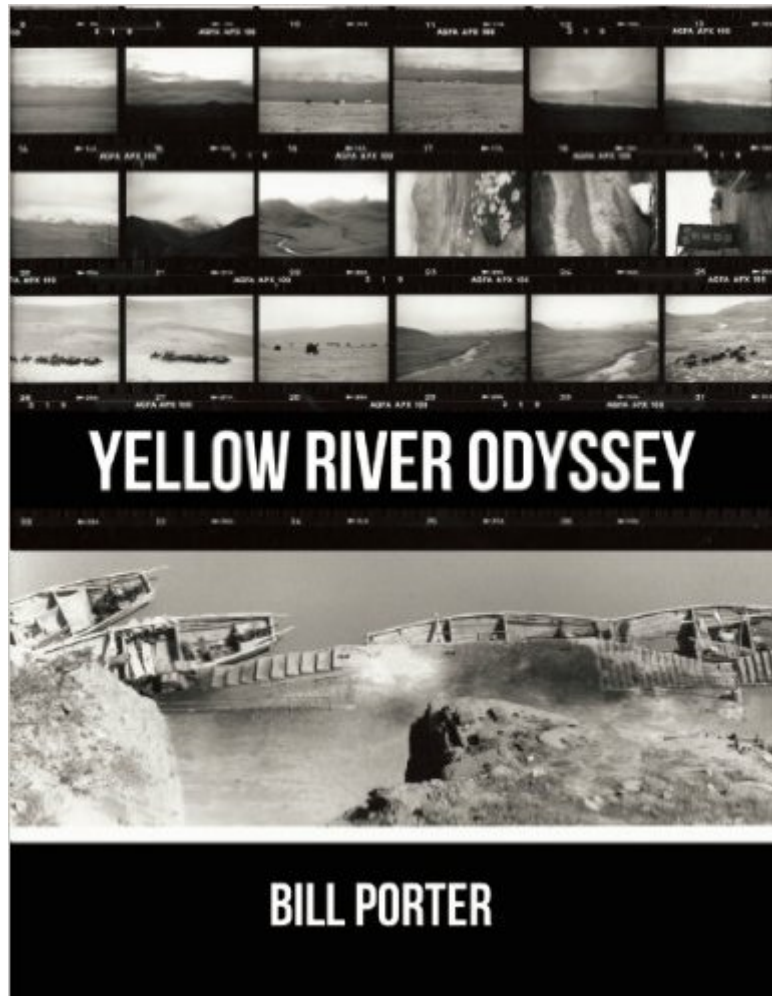


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# Yellow River Odyssey



## Synopsis

Bill Porter follows the Yellow River, the world's sixth longest river, from its mouth to its source high in the Tibetan Plateau, a journey of more than three thousand miles through nine Chinese provinces. The trip takes the master translator into what was once the cradle of Chinese civilization and to the hometowns and graves of key historical figures such as Confucius, Mencius, Lao-tzu, and Chuang-tzu. Porter's depth of knowledge of Chinese history and culture is unparalleled. *Yellow River Odyssey*, already a bestseller in China, reveals a complex, fascinating, contradictory country. Porter masterfully digs beneath China's present-day materialism and the deep wounds of the Cultural Revolution to get at the roots of Chinese culture. And he does so with an ever-present wit and a keen eye for the telling detail. The book also includes more than fifty black-and-white photographs taken by Porter during his travels. Bill Porter is an award-winning author and translator also known by his pen name, Red Pine. He is considered one of the foremost translators of Chinese texts, especially Buddhist and Taoist poetry and sutras. His translation work includes major Buddhist texts such as *The Platform Sutra*, *The Diamond Sutra*, and *The Heart Sutra* as well as the best-selling poetry collections *Taoteching* and *Collected Songs of Cold Mountain*. He is also the author of *Zen Baggage* and *Road to Heaven: Encounters with Chinese Hermits*. Porter lives in Port Townsend, Washington.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is an enjoyable book by Bill Porter, better known by his pen name "Red Pine", describing his early 1990s journey along the length of the Yellow River, beginning from where it enters the sea in

Shandong to its source in Qinghai. As the pre-eminent translator of classical Chinese in the disciplines of poetry, Buddhism and philosophy, he brings a vital and fascinating perspective to his travels. I particularly enjoy how he makes it a point to seek out less well-known, but still highly significant historical sites, of which even many Chinese are unaware. The China he depicts in the book has largely vanished, but for anyone who spent much time in China in the 1990s, it will result in knowing nods of the head. He writes in an uncomplicated, easy-going style--who knows, he may just be a Western incarnation of Xu Xiake (ã •éœ å®¢). The accompanying photos are spectacular, and evoked fond memories of my own journeys to many of the same places during the same period. His story ends rather abruptly, but the book was well worth the wait.

This is a fascinating travelogue of a journey up the Yellow River in China, from mouth to source (over 3100 miles). Along the way, the author opens door after door to peer into history and legends -- populated by kings, invaders, communities, temples, monuments and museums. It is a riveting account. The book is especially gripping when the author "returns" to the river, after wandering off occasionally to see some hidden treasures of history. But even the off-track musings are enjoyable, and the author reminds himself before long that it is time to return to the Yellow River and to the focus of the book. Several related chapters, together with the accompanying black and white pictures, are well-written and presented. We are all keyed up as the author searches for the Source of the river (last chapter). It is quite a page turner. En route, the many amusing stories of lodges, people, food and drink lighten the weight of history. Altogether a must read for river/history/China buffs.

I enjoyed this book. I'd read Bill's other two books about his travels in China, so I ordered a copy as soon as I came across an excerpt of this latest work in Tricycle magazine. I always find his travels interesting, in part because his working knowledge of language and culture (twenty years in Taiwan and Hong Kong) must give him advantages and perspectives that are not available to other tourists, in part because of the unassuming way he manages to give me a better understanding of the immense vistas of culture and history that are China. The prose never over-embroiders, self-promotes, or seeks to make some kind of social/ political/ spiritual point, but always remains matter-of-fact and grounded in everyday experience. My one disappointment was that this is not a contemporary account, but is already almost a historical document, in that it covers two months of early 1991, probably an aeon ago in terms of the China of today. However, for all I know, a 1991 journey may well be much more interesting than one made today. I do admire the energy and

determination that kept him going, aged 47, through two months of gruelling buses, trains, taxis, jeeps, and every other form of transport that can be imagined. Not only did he reach an arduous and challenging destination, but he made many a detour to significant sites. So, thank you Bill.

This is well written and quite interesting. Porter knows Chinese history and though I've been to China 4 times, after reading about his journey to the source of the yellow river, I want to go again. Will have to pass this book on to my wife and see if works as well on her.

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