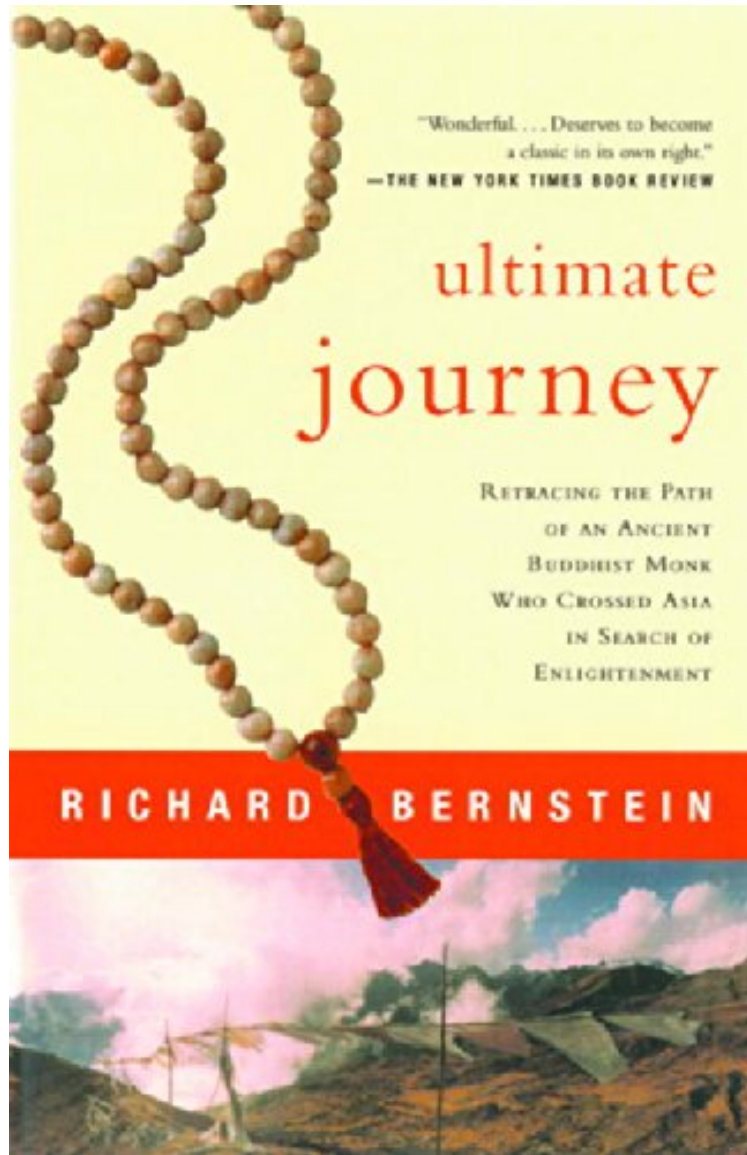


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Ultimate Journey: Retracing the Path of an Ancient Buddhist Monk Who Crossed Asia in Search of Enlightenment

Richard Bernstein

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#566653 in Books 2002-02-05 2002-02-05 Original language: English PDF # 1 7.50 x 1.00 x 5.20l, .67 #File Name: 0679781579368 pages | File size: 38.Mb

Richard Bernstein : Ultimate Journey: Retracing the Path of an Ancient Buddhist Monk Who Crossed Asia in Search of Enlightenment before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Ultimate Journey: Retracing the Path of an Ancient Buddhist Monk Who Crossed Asia in Search of Enlightenment:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. First Rate
By Richard, Sausalito California
This is an exceptionally fine travel book. It is very well written and well researched. Bernstein manages to describe the lands that he traveled with descriptions of their history exceedingly well. His thoughtful comments on previous travelers/explorers in and around the Taklamakan Desert contribute to an understanding of the region as it is today. Through it all he reveals a journey into his own heart that is touching, to say the least.

A very good book, more than worth the time to read it.
Richard
1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Bernstein's metaphysical quest
By J. David Williams
Bernstein has accomplished what few other travel writers are able to achieve. Think Colin Thubron, Peter Mathiessen, Tony Horowitz -- Bernstein's rich background not only in Chinese History but English Literature (Joyce, TS Eliot) -- expand the narrative to touch universal issues; this talent coupled with his sensory impressions of India are consistently entertaining-- I highly recommend this volume -- think Snow Leopard, Behind the Wall, Blue Latitudes-- ignore the pedantic "scholarly " reviews which call to mind the jealousy of academia over Barbra Tuchman's gift for historical narrative -- a gift that shames the tedious Thomistic penchant of academia to constantly "cough ink" when they pick up a pen!

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. TWO INCREDIBLE JOURNEYS
By M. Liu
The Ultimate Journey by Richard Bernstein was recommended to me by a friend who is a Buddhist scholar. Because of his strong recommendation, I read the book before I read the book's reviews in .com. I am fortunate to have read the book first, because reviews might have caused me to overlook an otherwise excellent book. The value of a book is determined by what transpires between the author and the reader based on a complex intellectual, cultural and personal synchrony. For me, this is the perfect book. In my opinion, a good book satisfactorily answers three questions: Is the writing literate? Am I entertained? Have I learned anything? Bernstein's book is not only literate, the writing is superb. He is a respected journalist, a book critic for the New York Times and an author of books. In my view, he and his editor have done a marvelous job in presenting a complex physical and contemplative journey that weave in and out of the present and the past, and encompass immense historical, cultural and spiritual domains. Am I entertained? Tremendously! I appreciate his subtle humor and irony, even his dissatisfaction with his life and the frustration he experienced as he travels through China and central Asia. Anyone who really knows China would appreciate his humorous treatment of the bureaucracy, the peculiar and sometimes comic mindset and behavior of the people (as seen from the Western viewpoint), and the overcrowding, dusty, monotonous cities. As a Chinese person, I don't think he is being arrogant or condescending. He was telling the truth and he hasn't told the worst. Have I learned anything? An enormous amount! Born and raised in China, the first novel I read in 4th grade was "Journey to the West." It was about a Tang dynasty monk who went on a long journey to the "Western Heaven" in search of the sutra. The monk was accompanied by his three disciples: a monkey and a pig in human forms and Friar Sand. The pig was greedy, the monkey cunning and they have supernatural power that had protected the monk from demons and wild beasts on the way. The book was an all time classic, loved by children through the ages, but it was a mythological novel. Now in my golden years, I am thrilled to learn the truth about the Tang monk Hsuan Tsang, his incredible 16-year journey to India, the landscape, the history and the politics, then and now. I am delighted to learn about the modern-day pilgrim Richard Bernstein, his childhood, his ethnic and religious background, how he started his career, his inner thoughts and feelings. It sounds like a fairy tale that a Jewish boy from a chicken farm in Connecticut and a girl from a State farm in Helongjian undertake a joint adventure retracing the steps of a 7th century Chinese monk! Frankly I am puzzled by the criticism, obviously from younger readers, that the book was fueled by Bernstein's mid-life crisis and that he traveled by jet planes and puddle-jumped from one nice hotel to the next. True, had he undertaken the journey while in his twenties, he would have been physically more adventurous, he might have climbed the icy mountains, crossed the scorching desert on camel back just as the Tang monk had done. But then we have to wait 16 years to read his chronicle assuming he survived. Had he undertaken this journey as a young man, I am not sure he would have had nearly as much wisdom and insight as he does in his fifties. Last, but not the least, is the love story. Again I can relate to his loneliness as an unmarried person, and his ambivalence about commitment. Luckily for Bernstein, he found love in the nick of time. I hope he and Zongmei have beautiful, dark-eyed children and live happily ever after.
H. Mei Liu, M.D. author of GRANDFATHER'S MICROSCOPE

In 629, the revered Buddhist monk Hsuan Tsang set out across Asia in search of the Ultimate Truth, and to settle what he called the perplexities of my mind. From the Tang dynasty capital at Xian through ancient Silk Road oases, over forbidding mountain passes to Tashkent, Samarkand, and the Amu-Darya River, across Pakistan to the holiest cities of India and back again his sixteen-year journey was beset with every hardship imaginable. Pilgrimage complete, Hsuan Tsang wrote an account of his trek that is still considered one of the classics of Chinese literature. In 1998, Richard Bernstein, venerated journalist and Time magazine's first Beijing bureau chief, retraced the steps of Hsuan Tsang's long and sinuous route, comparing present and past. Aided by modern technology but hampered by language barriers, harried border crossings, hostile Islamic regimes, and the accidental U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, Bernstein follows the monks path not only in physical but in contemplative ways. Juxtaposing his own experiences with those of Hsuan Tsang, Bernstein has crafted a vivid account of two stirring adventures in pursuit of illumination. Inspiring and profoundly felt, Ultimate Journey is a marvelous amalgamation of travelogue and history,

cultural critique and spiritual meditation.

.com In 629, a Chinese Buddhist monk named Hsuan Tsang left the Tang dynasty capital Chang-an (current-day Xian) and set off to India to see the principal shrines of his religion. His path was arduous, involving the passage of vast deserts and towering mountains, and the record he made of his years-long voyage served generations of travelers along the Silk Road until, finally, it was forgotten. Richard Bernstein, a former New York Times correspondent in China (and now a book critic for that newspaper), follows Hsuan's trail in this outstanding narrative of his overland journey into the heart of Central Asia, a journey that takes him and the fortunate reader into places that few travelers are privileged to see--places, such as Kashgar and Samarkand, that have storied associations but that remain remote even in the age of CNN and fast jets. Though not without his fears and not without getting into a little trouble, Bernstein talks to just about everyone he meets along the way, pokes into little-known corners of history, and spins a wonderfully literate story of difficult travel that recalls such books as Robert Byron's *Road to Oxiana* and Bruce Chatwin's *The Songlines*. Anyone who has ever dreamed of seeing the Ganges River and the Taklimakan Desert will find much pleasure in Bernstein's pages. --Gregory McNamee

From Publishers Weekly

Bernstein, a New York Times book critic and former Time magazine Beijing bureau chief, traces the famous travel route of the seventh-century Buddhist monk Hsuan Tsang in this self-absorbed spiritual travel odyssey. In 629 C.E. the well-connected Hsuan Tsang decided to defy his emperor and travel to India in his quest for greater knowledge and enlightenment. His 15-year epic journey has provided inspiration for Chinese writers and schoolchildren for centuries, although it has not been as influential in the West. Bernstein, a nonpracticing Jew, admits he has only a mild interest in Buddhism, but Tsang's route had not been retraced for several centuries, so Bernstein seized the opportunity. Unfortunately, his lack of focus dulls the book's impact. Given the great travel, religious and political descriptions such a story could generate, Bernstein seems more concerned with understanding his own loneliness and lack of commitment to relationships than describing his adventure fully. The narrative floats along, occasionally stopping for a detailed description of history (as a former student of the late historian John King Fairbank, Bernstein knows his history) or of traveling companions such as Brave King. Readers who are keen on Asian travel and the historical roots of Buddhism will find this book of mild interest, but others will agree with Bernstein's own assessment in the introduction: this is "a story of a man whose biggest problem was an inability, having gotten to a certain point, to get further." Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

From Library Journal

In 629, a Buddhist monk named Hsuan Tsang set out from China, crossing Asia in search of Buddhist truth. Bernstein, a book critic for the New York Times and former Beijing bureau chief for Time magazine, decided to retrace the monk's journey over the silk road to Pakistan and India and back to China. In this entertaining and well-written account, more travel literature than religious study, he juxtaposes his account of Hsuan Tsang's experiences with descriptions of his own trials as he journeyed through remote country and met with religious leaders and teachers. Hsuan Tsang's story is well known in China and other parts of Asia, and he is revered as a serious seeker who apparently succeeded in his quest. Bernstein's motives were somewhat more modest: he attempts to come to terms with his Jewish roots as well as his tentative and puzzled dabblings with Buddhist philosophy, and his book comes off as another account of a privileged American scratching a mid-life spiritual itch. He's at his best when he flexes his journalistic skills and draws on his considerable knowledge of Asia to create vivid and telling descriptions of present-day conditions in Asia. By the end of the journey Bernstein has endeared himself to us and we wish him well. Not an essential title but enjoyable and suitable for most collections. -DMark Woodhouse. Elmira Coll., NY Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc.