



The Corpse Walker: Real Life Stories: China From the Bottom Up

By Liao Yiwu

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The Corpse Walker introduces us to regular men and women at the bottom of Chinese society, most of whom have been battered by life but have managed to retain their dignity: a professional mourner, a human trafficker, a public toilet manager, a leper, a grave robber, and a Falung Gong practitioner, among others. By asking challenging questions with respect and empathy, Liao Yiwu managed to get his subjects to talk openly and sometimes hilariously about their lives, desires, and vulnerabilities, creating a book that is an instance par excellence of what was once upon a time called “The New Journalism.” **The Corpse Walker** reveals a fascinating aspect of modern China, describing the lives of normal Chinese citizens in ways that constantly provoke and surprise.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. In this rich, often harrowing oral history, Chinese writer (and notorious target of censors) Liao travels to the margins of Chinese society, interviewing 27 outsiders from China's forgotten classes. The book contains an incredible cast of characters: a grave robber, a composer, a leper, a professional mourner paid to wail at funerals, a human trafficker and a delusional peasant who has anointed himself emperor. These conversations, largely recorded from memory, showcase Liao's empathy for his subjects and a particular talent for getting into tight situations; on one occasion, the author is forced to leap out of a three-story building when he fears the Communist government is targeting him for talking to a Falun Gong supporter. Liao's research took 11 years, and his final product is a stunning series of portraits of a generation and class of individuals ignored in history books and unacknowledged in the accounts of the new China. (Apr.)

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From [Booklist](#)

Poet and novelist Liao, imprisoned for four years by the Chinese government for his poem condemning the massacre at Tiananmen Square, offers intimate portraits of ordinary people in China. Using interviews with hundreds of villagers whose lives have not benefited from the astounding economic growth of the new China, he offers oral histories of their lives lived day to day. Among his interview subjects are professional mourners, a former Red Guard, a trafficker in women, a grave robber, and a former political prisoner. Liao talked to people in villages where traditions have changed little as well as those where the old ways have clashed with the Revolution. A man recounts how fear of leprosy and evil dragons prompted villagers to burn his wife alive. The shocked husband was then obligated to feed them at a festival afterward. A retired government official recounts the hardships during the Cultural Revolution, the passion of the villagers and the hypocrisy of leaders, and the need for an honest assessment and apology. Liao offers rich detail about people who live well outside the spotlight trained on China. --Vanessa Bush

Review

“Revealing. . . . full of forbearance and forgiveness. . . . Each re-created interview...captures a particular individual at a crucial time in Chinese history.”

—*The New York Times Book Review*

“Stunning. . . . Revealing in its incidental details. . . . Liao brings us fascinating insights into the lives of all manner of workers....an addictive book.”

—*Bookforum*

“Reading **The Corpse Walker** is like walking with Liao: Even though our feet are not blistered and our bodies are not starved, in the end we are shaken and moved.”

—*San Francisco Chronicle*

From the Trade Paperback edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

John Tammaro:

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Mary Abrams:

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