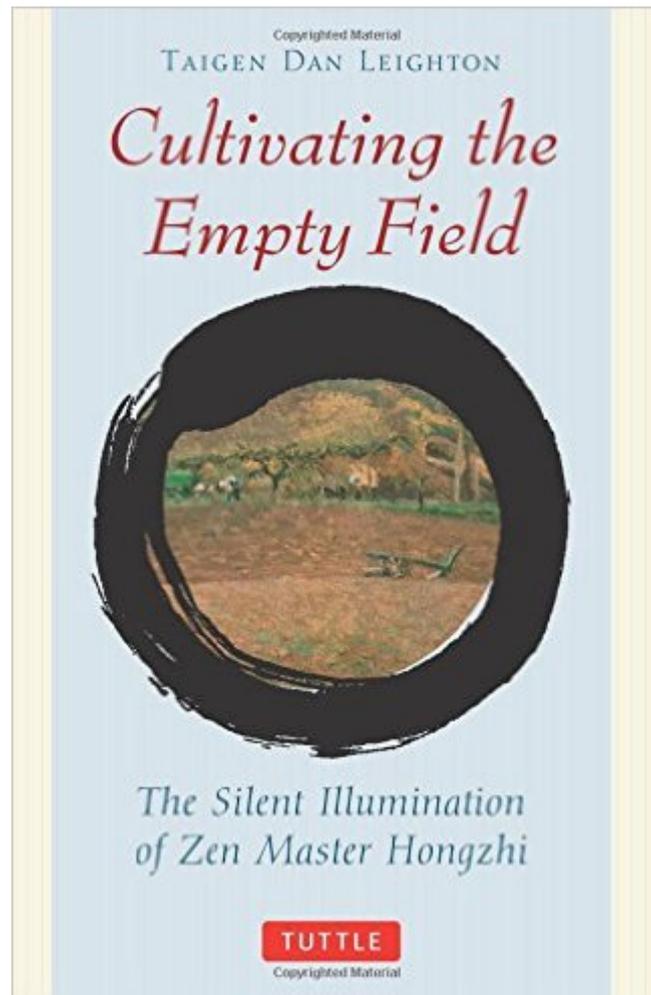


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# Cultivating The Empty Field: The Silent Illumination Of Zen Master Hongzhi



## Synopsis

Cultivating the Empty Field is a modern translation of the core of Chinese Ch'an master Hongzhi's Extensive Record. First to articulate the meditation method known to contemporary Zen practitioners as shikantaza ("just sitting") Chinese Zen master Hongzhi is one of the most influential poets in all of Zen literature. This translation of Hongzhi's poetry, the only such volume available in English, treats readers to his profound wisdom and beautiful literary gift. In addition to dozens of Hongzhi's religious poems, translator Daniel Leighton offers an extended introduction, placing the master's work in its historical context, as well as lineage charts and other information about the Chinese influence on Japanese Soto Zen. Both spiritual literature and meditation instruction, Cultivating the Empty Field is sure to inspire and delight.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

At first I balked at paying the asking price for this very slim book. It's good to have the poems (though Chinese Buddhist verse, telegraphic and full of technical terms, is notoriously hard to translate.) The Introduction and Notes are also helpful, but you mainly buy the book for Master Hung-chih's "Practice Instructions," a mere 28 pages! Having bought the book and read it a number of times I realise that it would be a bargain at any price. This book is a jewel. It's said that the elegance of the original Chinese can't be conveyed in translation. If this is the case it must be truly sublime, because even in English the prose reads like translucent poetry. I can't think of any other spiritual writing outside of the world of Sufism that combines profundity with beauty of style to quite

the same degree. A classic of koan Zen like the "Blue Cliff Record" is a fabulous mine of wisdom, but its extreme difficulty makes it all but inaccessible outside of the context of institutional Zen monasticism. But this book comes from the other stream of Zen, the school of Silent Illumination, and it has something to offer everyone from the most advanced practitioner to the newest beginner who can only bathe in its atmosphere of beauty and wonder. Poetry is able somehow to express the inexpressible, and the boundless silent truth of Zen is conveyed more clearly by these luminous phrases than by anything else I've ever read. I can't overpraise this book. I wish I had more than five stars to award. If you're interested in Zen, or Buddhism, or meditation, and you don't own this book, buy it immediately. If I could keep only one book on Zen, this would be the book. One of Master Hung-chih's crammed, poetic, evocative paragraphs is worth several dozen books by lesser writers.

I read this shortly after it first came out. It seemed OK and I put it aside. Several years ago --and after more sitting practice and retreats-- I reread it and now I think it is a treasure. In the translated passages/poems, Hongzhi is speaking consistently from a deeply enlightened experience. Someone new to Zen may find this collection of talks from a twelfth century Chinese master fuzzy and not very helpful. But for someone with experience sitting, it is profound. Dogen also gave Hongzhi "five stars" in Shobogenzo. Hongzhi's words have become my favorite sitting companion.

I've been aspiring to 'just sit' for about 30 yrs. This book expresses the foundation of this practice and I've tried to study it closely. Still, I have no idea what I am doing. The wisdom in the words resonates and inspires my practice more than anything I've ever read. I am very grateful it is available for me to read.

I would agree that this text has a better chance of being meaningful after a few years of sitting. And for anyone (like me) who gets pretty twisted up studying Dogen's assertive essays, I would definitely recommend this as an antidote to Dogen's assertions that turn and twist in on themselves. My teacher called this Grandmother Zen, but, you know in a good way. It's gentle, but comes from considerable depth. I lived with this book by sticking with one page/week for over a year. That seemed to be a very good way to let it sink in. As I said my very favorite Zen text, excellent translation.

This is one of the best books I've ever read -- on Zen, Buddhism or Spirituality in general. Hongzhi was obviously as clear as they get, and his subtle and powerful language and insight is an

inspiration to any practitioner, from any tradition. This book is a must read for anyone who seeks a deeper understanding of Reality.

Cultivating the Empty Field: The Silent Illumination of Zen Master Hongzhi was recommended to me by Sensei Daishin at ZCLA. Normally, I have a lot of trouble making sense of Asian metaphors. This time, I decided to invest the effort purely out of respect for Sensei's advice. I have been well rewarded. The book (translated by Taigen Dan Leighton) is a collection of dharma talks given by Hongzhi in the 12th century. Each is quite short - often less than one page - but I found I could only read one per day if I really considered the text. In fact, I usually read a new talk every other day. I wholeheartedly recommend this book, but be warned! you must carefully consider each talk before moving to the next. It is very tempting to blow through the book as it is very short. The content is very to-the-point, but you have to exert yourself to penetrate the layers of meaning.

Journey with translator Taigen Daniel Leighton (with the assistance of Yi Wu), as he explores a collection of thoughts from the mind of a brilliant 12th century philosopher, Zen Master Hongzhi. Clearly this is a labor of love, from many perspectives. I wouldn't necessarily recommend this book as a first foray into eastern philosophy, but it is wonderful to see how rich the lives of humans can be, even when they lived 800 years ago. And how rich your own life could be.

Pithy contemplations for bringing us back to the simplicity of the view. As others have mentioned this is likely most beneficial to those who have been meditating for several years or more. Though it's a Zen text it will be equally satisfying to the Mahamudra or Dzogchen practitioner.

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