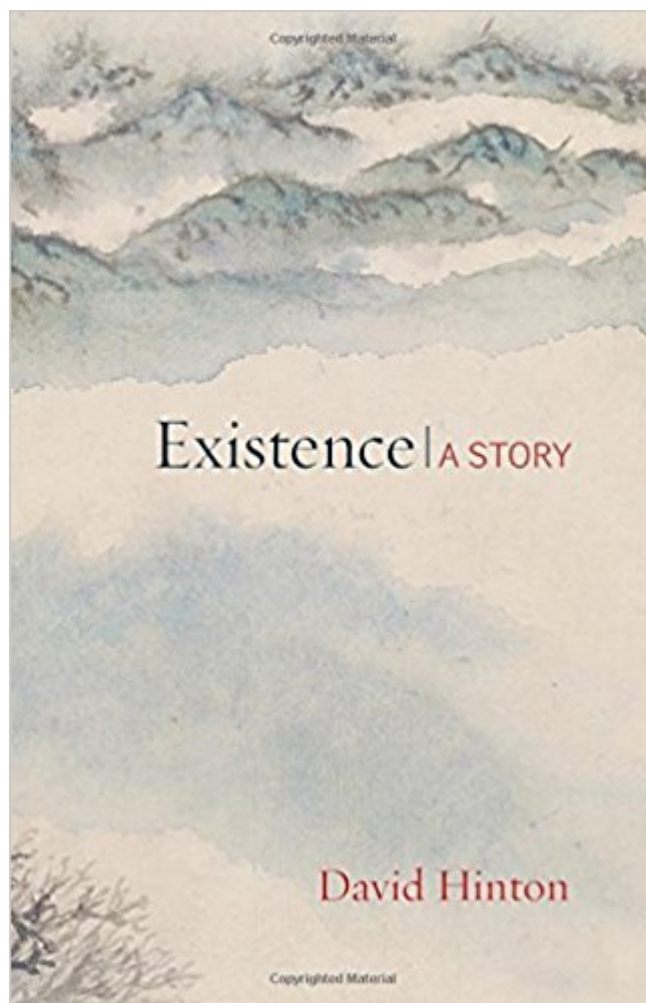


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# Existence: A Story



## Synopsis

The mystery of existence and our place in that mystery--as expressed in a single Chinese landscape painting: a new work of meditative philosophy by the renowned translator of the Chinese classics and author of *Hunger Mountain*. Join David Hinton, the premier modern translator of the Chinese classics, as he stands before a single landscape painting, discovering in it the wondrous story of existence and as part of that story, the magical nature of consciousness. What he coaxes from the image is nothing less than a revelation: the dynamic interweaving of mind and Cosmos, and the glorious dance of Absence and Presence that is the secret of that Cosmos. The painting called *Peaceful-Distance Pavilion* by Shih-t'ao (1642-1707) is, like other paintings in that genre, mostly space: one tiny figure, accompanied by an attendant, looks out over a vast landscape of mountains and clouds. But start looking into that space and, with the right guidance, what you end up seeing is profound. David Hinton is the perfect guide. He uses his knowledge of Chinese philosophy, poetry, art, language, and writing system to illuminate this painting's message, which is ultimately the story of the glorious dance between nothing and everything, between emptiness and existence. It's an enthralling journey that can change the way you look at the world, a journey for which David is a wise and eloquent guide.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In extraordinarily deft and patient hands, David Hinton delivers us into the unknowable. Using as his guide the Chinese landscape painter Shih T'ao and other sage poet-painter-wanderers, he takes us to the very brink of existence and consciousness, beyond linguistic dualities of past

and future,Â propelled by the life force that drives through us, from one step to theÂ next . . . you can almost hear the footfalls of his thinking and Châ™an practice . . .Â until we find ourselves in the strange surroundings of empty mind and fullÂ heart, and finally, equanimity. It is an uncanny journey, essential for all.â•â "Gretel Ehrlich, author ofÂ Facing the WaveÂ andÂ This Cold Heavenâ œA pellucid gem of a bookâ "I couldnâ™t put it down. Through the vision ofÂ a single, inexhaustible paintingâ "whose depth opens onto the mysteriesÂ of meditation, calligraphy, poetry, and existence itselfâ "Hinton graduallyÂ discloses for us the whole vast and fathomless landscape of Taoist and Châ™anÂ (Zen) spirituality. At first we gaze wonder-struck into the many-mountainedÂ distance; soon we find ourselves immersed; and then we dissolve into theÂ châ™i-mist drifting up the forested slopes.â•â "David Abram, author ofÂ The Spell of the Sensuousâ œ[Hinton is a] rare example of a literary Sinologistâ "that is, a classical scholarÂ thoroughly conversant with, and connected to, contemporary literatureÂ in English.â•â "New York Review of Books

DAVID HINTON is one of the most renowned translators of the Chinese Classics of our time. He has received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences for his bookÂ Hunger Mountain, which was also designated as a Book-of-the-Year byÂ TheÂ Guardian. He was the recipient of the 1997 American Academy of Poets Harold Morton Landon Translation Award and the 2007 PEN Award for translation. He was a 2003 Guggenheim Fellow, and has also been awarded fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Merrill Foundation, and the Witter Bynner Foundation. He has published more than sixteen other books, among them translations of theÂ Tao Te Ching, theÂ Chuang Tzu, the poems of Li Po, and his monumentalÂ Classical Chinese Poetry: An Anthology.

David Hinton'sÂ Existence: A Story,Â a followup toÂ Hunger Mountain,Â continues his exploration of Chinese philosophy via painting, calligraphy, poetry, Taoism, and Châ™an Buddhism. A tall order, and one he pulls off with finesse. Using an ethereal landscape painting by Shih-Tâ™ao (1642-1707), Hinton manages to travel through the inner workings of the artist'sÂ mind and explicate why such artwork provides us an opportunity for awakening in the most profound sense of the word. Any fan ofÂ Hunger MountainÂ will enjoy picking up the author'sÂ trek through some of the most profound ideas coursing through the human experience. But what makesÂ ExistenceÂ even

more interesting is the sheer exuberance shining through in the new work. There seems to be no question that Hinton has hit his stride, each book pushing the envelope a bit further, probing into the underbelly of what Lao Tzu and the old Chinese Taoist masters have been trying to tell us for centuries. And thanks to Hinton, it's possible that the dark enigma will now seem a little less shadowy. Good stuff!

This is like reading Zhuangzi in bed with a cold, crisp scotch and soda – effervescent and intoxicating – the fizzy quality of emptiness, its possibilities; all those little moments that make you dance. It seems cosmic when emptiness embraces broad landscapes, and at the same time personal, as a puff of air bounces elemental particles against your face – I do enjoy a breeze. David Hinton is a delight to read, and Shitao may be his best and most suitable project. I will bow respectfully toward his whereabouts in the morning, but for now, another page, another sip of emptiness.

David Hinton seems to want to give us a summa of Asian mysticism. In doing this, he seeks to find everything in one painting by Shitao which accompanies a poem by Yan-I. While I have nothing but admiration for both the painter and the poet, I think Hinton reads an awful lot into the painting and the poem. This reminds me of others who attempted to explain too much -- R.H. Blyth and Alan Watts come to mind. Wordy illustrations obscure Asian wisdom. I prefer scholarship which seeks only to lay out the results of focused research and reflection and leaves us to come to personal understanding. Jonathan Hay's treatment of Shitao is all we need. Another criticism I have is that Hinton tends to lump all Western philosophy together, simplifies it and overlooks or doesn't care to know all its metaphysical insights. The mystery of existence, something originating in pre-Socratic philosophy and resurfacing in the scholastic philosophy of Thomas Aquinas and some who followed in his footsteps, gives priority to existence over ideas/concepts, and is radically anti-Cartesian. In his bias, Hinton is content to cite only Descartes as if he personified all Western philosophy and culture. A problem with some books published by Shambhala: they cater to the pseudo-mystical appetites of Westerners. I am not making any sort of unfavorable statement about Asian religion and philosophy, just the forms that these have taken in an atmosphere of Western consumerism.

Excellent book. It's all there...

I guess the best and only way to effectively and successfully convey an idea is to become that idea. David Hinton, via his quest to understand and translate the sage artists of ancient China has become one himself. We are the winners for it.

Reading this book is a transformative experience

Too many words, but exquisite painting sHard to read on a Device. Taoism and Chan are not the same....

very well written...I didn't understand much of it...above my pay grade...

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