

Editor's Foreword

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In May 2024, the Department of Asian Studies at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana—publisher of the journal *Asian Studies*—hosted an international conference exploring the idea of nothingness (see <https://as.ff.uni-lj.si/en/does-nothingness-exist-cross-continental-dialogue>). The event proved to be a resounding success, attracting a diverse group of distinguished scholars specializing in Asian and Euro-American philosophical traditions. The conference served as a dynamic platform for engaging and thought-provoking discussions on concepts such as emptiness, the void, nothing, absence, and related ideas, effectively bridging different intellectual traditions and schools of thought.

These exchanges revealed a profound truth: that “nothing really matters”—not only in the sense of an all-encompassing beginning whose significance lies in its very insignificance, its inherent arbitrariness, and the profound absence of itself, but also in the sense of something that ends where it begins, and begins where it ends.

We thus agreed that the conclusion of this remarkable conference should not imply the end of our exploration into the elusive nature of nothingness. Instead, we decided to extend this exciting journey by publishing a special issue of *Asian Studies*, dedicated to these profound and often ambiguous questions. As such, this publication serves as a continuation of the dialogue, inviting further reflection and scholarship on a topic that remains as compelling as it is enigmatic.

Following the publication of a Call for Papers on this thematic scope, we were met with an overwhelming response, receiving a remarkable number of submissions. The quality and significance of many of these contributions were such that rejecting them solely due to the constraints of a single issue was simply not feasible. Recognizing the depth and breadth of the scholarship presented, we made the decision to expand our plans.

As a result, we are pleased to announce that the issue focusing on nothingness will now be published as a double issue. Part one is the present issue, released in May 2025, and it will be followed by part two, which will be published in the next regular issue, scheduled for September of the same year. This extended format allows us to accommodate a greater number of exceptional works, ensuring that the richness and diversity of the discourse on nothingness are fully represented and accessible to our readers.

We are thrilled to present these thought-provoking contributions and to continue fostering meaningful dialogue on this profound and multifaceted theme. We look forward to sharing these insightful explorations with the academic community and beyond, and we extend our gratitude to all the scholars who have made this expanded project possible.

The volume in your hands is the first part of this double issue. It is focused on the exploration of conceptual tensions—and particularly in relation to negation, absence, and nothingness—across different philosophical traditions. It is structured into three sections, and opens with one titled *Paradox and Contradictions*.

The three papers published in this opening section all explore the manifold connotations of this topic by examining how nothingness, absence, or negation shape fundamental aspects of existence, selfhood, and relationships. Graham Priest engages with the paradoxical nature of nothingness itself, revealing its contradictory role as both something and nothing. Kevin James Turner explores the tension between life and death in the *Zhuangzi*, showing how death, often seen as negation, paradoxically enables renewal and transformation. David Chai examines the notion of friendship in Daoism, arguing that it is rooted in the absence or nothingness between individuals rather than in concrete emotional or ethical bonds. Each paper highlights how contradiction is not merely a logical problem but a dynamic force that structures reality, experience, and relationships.

The papers in the second section, which is titled *From Absence to Nothingness, From Nothing to Emptiness*, explore the dynamic relationships among absence, nothingness, and emptiness across different philosophical traditions, showing how these concepts are not static voids but active forces shaping existence, knowledge, and transformation. Tamara Ditrich examines how Theravāda Buddhism conceptualizes absence as a moral and meditative foundation, leading from nothingness to the ultimate emptiness of *nibbāna*. Jana S. Rošker contrasts Wang Bi's *benwu* (fundamental absence) with Nishida Kitaro's absolute nothingness (*zettai mu* 絶対無), revealing differences between absence and nothingness, and pointing in this way to the often overlooked Daoist groundings of the Kyoto School. Raphaël Van Daele investigates Guō Xiàng's reinterpretation of *wú* (無) as a purely linguistic or nominalist construct, challenging its ontological power and reorienting Daoist thought toward a world of self-so transformations.

The last section, titled *Comparative Perspectives*, consists of only two papers, which are nevertheless deeply engaged in examining nothingness from distinct yet interconnected viewpoints. As the section title suggests, both papers explore the concept of nothingness through a comparative lens: Andrej Ule's paper explores the paradoxes of understanding and perception in relation to nothingness,

using a conceptual and analytical approach. Selusi Ambrogio's paper, on the other hand, brings together two seemingly opposing figures—Wang Fuzhi and Charles de Bovelles—to challenge the assumption that Western and Chinese traditions view nothingness in entirely different ways. What unites both papers in this section is their comparative engagement with different perspectives—whether through contrasting interpretations within a single conceptual framework (Ule) or through a cross-cultural philosophical dialogue (Ambrogio).

In this issue, we have brought together contributions from authors not only across different geographical regions but also from diverse intellectual traditions, each offering unique interpretations and insights into the nature of nothingness. This elusive yet fundamental concept challenges our understanding of reality and invites us to push the boundaries of thought itself.

As always, this thematic focus is intricately woven into the fabric of our journal's previous issues. Time and again, concepts such as nothingness (see e.g. Hashi 2015; Nelson 2023; Rošker 2024) emptiness (Kapetan 2012; Vojtíšková 2015; Ule 2016), absence (Sernelj 2013; 2022; Rošker 2016; Ardizzoni 2021; Parkes 2023), negation (Altinok 2019; Wu 2024), and contradiction (Heubel 2019; Duh 2012; Tian 2019) have taken centre stage on these pages, demonstrating that certain philosophical inquiries are as persistent as they are elusive.

This recurring engagement is not merely coincidental but rather a testament to the subtle yet significant threads that define our journal's intellectual landscape. These threads may seem intangible—almost like nothing—but, as this issue once again confirms, nothingness has always a way of making its presence felt.

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