

Nina Petek

Foreword**The Fullness of Emptiness: Buddhism between Image and Experience**

The cohesive thread of the present thematic section of *Ars & Humanitas*, as its title “The Fullness of Emptiness: Buddhism between Image and Experience” indicates, is emptiness. This is the fundamental concept of Buddhism as a whole, since its beginnings, which the founder of the tradition, Siddhartha Gautama Buddha (c. 560–480 BC), steadily built upon with his insight into the impermanence of all living things. Since his death, as Buddhism diversified into many streams and schools, even beyond the borders of India, emptiness has taken on a variety of images, all united by its essential feature, which runs through all the varied expressions of the tradition, quite contrary to the common understanding of emptiness as negativity in the sense of a meaningless and fruitless nothingness. In Buddhism, especially in the light of the doctrine of transience and the close interconnectedness of all living things, emptiness is defined as the dynamic totality of being. One meaning of the Sanskrit term for emptiness, *śūnyatā*, is absence, referring to the absence of any permanence, while another meaning explains the very nature of this absence as (all)-presence. This apparent contradictory definition is made clear by the etymology of *śūnyatā*, derived from the Sanskrit verb root *śvi-*, meaning “to grow”, “to increase”, “to swell”. This meaning is further deepened by the suffix *-tā*, which in Sanskrit denotes totality, illustrating the nature of emptiness, which is not empty but overflowing with an immeasurable, unfathomable abundance of being. This overabundance, free from permanence, hierarchies, value scales and any kind of limitation, grows and grows with the ever-emerging, ever-transforming and ever-new becoming phenomena. Thus Buddhist emptiness is not a negation of the world and life, but an affirmation of all its manifested forms, a pulsating union that brings together their infinite diversity. It is something that is present in everything, takes on many forms and expresses itself in the most varied ways, but can never be fully expressed, because, in its ever-changing character as the fundamental characteristic of all living things, it eludes any definitive – however sophisticated – form of linguistic expression.

A fragment of this multifaceted totality and its manifold expressive images, which ultimately find their expression in the non-conceptual experience of emptiness acquired through meditation, which in Buddhism is defined as the supreme realization transcending all theorizing, is captured in the thematically diverse contributions of the thematic section, which discuss the many facets of emptiness in Buddhist currents and schools

in India, China, Japan and Tibet. Thus, quite unpredictably and unexpectedly, the present “story” of Buddhist emptiness emerged, built from four “chapters” following the conceptual-historical framework, starting in India, the land of origin of Buddhism, from where it spread to China, and thus to our second chapter, followed by a third section on Buddhism in Japan, before concluding with the fourth section, Tibetan branch of *Vajrayāna* Buddhism. Despite the smallness of our academic sphere, the range of contributions testifies to the fruitful work of Slovenian scholars working on the many fields of Buddhism and thus on the diverse theoretical and experiential aspects of emptiness. Their findings, also intertwined with reflections on encounters with Greek philosophy, Chinese Daoism, Confucianism and some streams of Western thought, are complemented by contributions from two foreign authors.

The first part of the thematic section thus dates back to the life of Siddhartha Gautama and the early formation of Buddhism, with Nina Petek and Franci Zore discussing the philosophical method of the Buddha, which he adopted from the ancient Indian sceptics and which also inspired the Greek philosopher Pyrrho, in their article “Buddha and Pyrrho: from the Emptiness of Views to the Fullness of Being”. The Buddha’s and Pyrrho’s sceptical attitude towards some established philosophical truths, their non-dogmatic soteriological practice of philosophizing, which goes beyond conventional ways of knowing and the skill of sophisticated argumentation, which rethinks the very role of philosophy as a way of peaceful existence, also influenced the currents that formed after the Buddha’s death, in particular the *Mahāyāna* school of Buddhism, known as the *Madhyamaka*. Goran Kardaš focuses on this school in his paper “The Concept of Emptiness and Accompanying Concepts in the Philosophical Analysis of *Madhyamaka*”, in particular with regard to the ontological and epistemological aspects of emptiness in the light of the relation between conventional and absolute truth. Within a few decades of its final establishment with its founder Nagarjuna (c. 150–250 CE), the *Madhyamaka* experienced a great flowering in the field of Buddhist logic and epistemology, with its most influential philosophers being Dignaga (c. 480–540 CE) and Dharmakirti (c. 600–670 CE). Dignaga’s semantic theory of exclusion (Skt. *apoha*), with which Buddhist philosophers tried to resolve the question of the status of universals, was particularly prominent in philosophical circles at that time, and this is discussed by Jiří Holba in his paper “The Concept of Exclusion (*Apoha*) in Buddhist Philosophy”.

Within a few decades of its beginnings in India, Buddhism had reached other countries in Asia, among the first of which was China in the 1st century CE, and the Chinese sages recognized the many conceptual affinities between the foreign system of thought and the indigenous philosophical tradition of Daoism. Some ontological, ethical and soteriological segments that unite the two philosophies, Daoism and Buddhism, especially the *Mahāyāna* branch of the latter, are discussed in the paper “Emptiness, Ethics, Nihilism. *Mahāyāna* Buddhism and Classical Daoism”, with which the second part of

the thematic section begins. This work is presented by Sebastijan Pešec, who, on the basis of a presentation of the two philosophies ontological assumptions, also points to some distorted understandings of both systems as nihilistic. While the aforementioned paper focuses on comparisons of selected teachings of Buddhism and Daoism, Jana S. Rošker's article "*Chan or Zen? The Origin and Transformation of the Bodhidharma School of Meditation*" presents the school of Chinese Buddhism known as *Chan*, which emerged as a unique synthesis of Buddhism, Daoism and particular segments of Confucianism. The author supports the analysis of the ideological foundations of the indigenous system of Chinese Buddhism with an outline of its historical development, in the course of which the formation of *Chan* was accompanied by the emergence of other schools. Since its arrival in China, Buddhism has been deeply rooted in Chinese spiritual horizons and has taken on diverse expressions throughout different historical periods. Jan Vrhovski, in his paper "Buddhist Realism for Modern Times: Intellectual-Historical Readings into Dharma Master Taixu's Essays on Realism", situates the discussion in the Republican Era and presents the main features of Taixu's (1890–1947) understanding of realism. In the article he also analyses Taixu's critical accounts of modern philosophical currents in contemporary China, including Russell's "New Realism" and materialism.

While Buddhism came to China directly from its land of origin, it reached Japan through Korean and Chinese emissaries in the 6th century CE. The development of Buddhism in the Land of the Rising Sun has also been marked by the dynamic process of the formation of a number of schools, including *Zen* Buddhism, which has its roots in the philosophical foundations of the Chinese *Chan* school. The philosophical foundations of classical *Zen* have also influenced more recent schools in Japan, among which, also because of its dialogue with some currents of Western philosophy, the Kyōto School (Jap. *Kyōto-gakuha*) is of particular interest, whose most prominent philosophers include Nishida Kitarō and Hisamatsu Shin'ichi. Tara Peternell's paper "The Place of Absolute Nothingness: Approaching the (Non-)Self in Nishida's Thought", which begins the third part of the thematic section, discusses the central doctrines of Nishida's philosophical system, i.e. pure experience, *basho* and absolute nothingness. This paper also sheds light on the problem of the individual self in relation to the world, the ways of bridging the gap between subject and object, and the path leading to their union, in which both poles, despite their mutual interconnectedness, retain their particularities. Janko Lozar's article "Heidegger and Hisamatsu. On the Way to Mutual Alterity" offers a reflection on another kind of mutuality, that of European and Japanese thought. The author discusses the encounters between the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger and the Buddhist thought of Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, and more specifically between Hisamatsu's concept of nothingness and Heidegger's truth of being, as in a subtle dialogue both philosophies allow each other autonomy and thus reveal their own uniqueness in this special convergence. *Zen* Buddhism has been the subject of many interpretations

since it was first introduced in the West, some of which are presented by Adnan Sivić and Sebastjan Vörös in their paper “Beyond Elimination and Construction: *Zen*, Symbolism, and the Perennialist School”. The authors present some of the most important objections to eliminativism and constructivism, and outline a different understanding of the relation between Buddhist practice and enlightenment based on the perennialist tradition and the phenomenologically grounded idea of the symbol. In this context, the symbol gathers the particularities of *Zen* into a unified tradition, while pointing beyond them as a sign of something ineffable, comprehensible only in Buddhist practice.

The tradition presented in the last paper, which is a part of the fourth chapter of the thematic section, is especially strongly oriented towards meditation as a practice – it stands on its own, alone, entirely in the spirit of the views of tradition itself. At the edge of socio-cultural horizons, conventional religious expressions and established philosophical discourses, where it has been since its beginnings, the tradition of Buddhist hermits and hermitesses (Skt. *yogi*, *yoginī*), which has its roots in *Vajrayāna* Buddhism, the last phase of the differentiation of Buddhism into three fundamental branches, cultivates the experiential heart of Buddhism through the practice of complex meditation techniques, which still continues today. Nina Petek and Jan Ciglencečki, in the paper “Buddhism in the Himalayan deserts: the Tradition of Yogis and Yoginis in Zangskar”, thus outline some aspects of the contemporary expression of the Buddhist eremitic tradition, which has been preserved in the Union Territory of Ladakh in the Indian Himalayas since the 11th century. This tradition, which relies solely on the direct, non-conceptual experience of emptiness, beyond the study of a stack of texts, since this alone leads to liberation from all attachments and afflictions into the blissful tranquillity of being, appeals for a search for emptiness in this world – in this mind, in this body, in this life. Because – if not now, then when?

He who maintains the doctrine of Emptiness
is not allured by the things of the world, because they have no basis.
He is not excited by gain or dejected by loss.
Fame does not dazzle him and infamy does not shame him.
Scorn does not repel him, praise does not attract him.
Pleasure does not please him, pain does not trouble him.
He who is not allured by the things of the world knows Emptiness,
and one who maintains the doctrine of Emptiness
has neither likes nor dislikes.
What he likes he knows to be only Emptiness –
and sees it as such.

From *Dharmasaṃgītisūtra* (transl. by Cecil Bendall)