

# Nothingness at the Crossroads of Minor Canons: A Dialogue between Wang Fuzhi and Charles de Bovelles

Selusi AMBROGIO\*

## Abstract

It is a mainstream assumption that Asian thinkers, and Chinese in particular, have devoted much of their speculative energies to investigating emptiness and nothingness, whereas these philosophical concepts would have been neglected (if not abhorred) in Western thought. As Sorensen (2022, 77) says: “Having climbed to the precipice of being, the Chinese and Indians pan across the vista of nothingness. They see an open horizon of opportunity. The Greeks look down the cliff. They suffer vertigo”. In this article, we set ourselves the task of questioning this assumption by presenting two authors who represent opposing tendencies within their respective traditions. On the one hand, Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692), normally described as a “materialist” and a bitter opponent of the “emptiness” and “nothingness” of Buddhists and Daoists. On the other, Charles de Bovelles (1479–1566), author of the short treatise *Liber de Nihilo*, in which nothingness is posited as necessary to God for his existence and the unfolding of his power. Despite being in different traditions and with different visions of nothingness, we will see how their respective thoughts can meet and engage in dialogue in a productive manner.

**Keywords:** nothingness, minor canons, Wang Fuzhi, Charles de Bovelles, negative theology, Neo-Confucianism

## Nič na stičišču drugotnih kanonov: dialog med Wang Fuzhijem in Charlesom de Bovellesom

### Izvleček

Prevladujoče prepričanje je, da so azijske mislice in misleci, med njimi še posebej kitajski, veliko svojih spekulativnih prizadevanj namenjali raziskovanju praznine in ničā, medtem ko naj bi bili v zahodni misli ti koncepti zapostavljeni (če ne kar z gnusom zavrnjeni). Kakor pravi Sorensen (2022, 77): »Ko priplezajo do previsa biti, se pred Kitajci in Indijci razprostre razgled ničā. Vidijo odprto obzorje priložnosti. Grki zrejo dol s pečine. Muči jih vrtoglavica.« V tem članku prevprašujemo to predpostavko s predstavtivijo dveh avtorjev, ki zastopata nasprotno težnjo znotraj svojih tradicij. Na eni strani je Wang

\* Selusi AMBROGIO, University of Macerata, Italy.  
Email address: selusi.ambrogio@unimc.it



Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692), ki ga po navadi opisujejo kot »materialista« ter zagrizenega nasprotnika »praznine« in »niča« budistov in daoistov. Na drugi je Charles de Bovelles (1479–1566), avtor kratke razprave *Liber de nihilo*, v kateri je nič postavljen kot nujnost za obstoj Boga in za razodevanje njegove moči. Kljub pripadnosti različnim tradicijam in različnim pogledom na nič bomo videli, kako se lahko njuna razmišljanja srečajo in stopijo v produktiven dialog.

**Ključne besede:** nič, drugotni kanoni, Wang Fuzhi, Charles de Bovelles, negativna teologija, neokonfucianizem

## Abbreviations

DSS: Wang Fuzhi, *Reading the Compendium of Discourses on the Four Books*

LN: Bovelles, *Liber de nihilo* (Book of Nothingness)

ZMZ: Wang Fuzhi, *Annotated Commentary to Master Zhang's Zhengmeng*

ZT: Wang Fuzhi, *Understanding of the Zhuangzi*

## Minor Canons as an Intercultural Methodological Frame

The contemporary voices critical of the Western philosophical tradition—i.e., posthumanism, transhumanism, environmentalism, decolonial or post-colonial perspectives, minority studies, etc.—have tended to place such thought within the definition of humanism in the sense of anthropocentrism. In doing so, the Greco-European tradition has tended to be schematized (reduced) in the context of late Enlightenment and 19th century philosophy, Kantian, Hegelian, positivist, etc., while neglecting the myriad rivulets and endless contradictions in the history of Greek, Roman, late antique, medieval, Renaissance and modern thought. The same crushing dynamic is also often used to define Chinese thought, which would instead be humanist in the Renaissance sense, naturalist and inevitably capable of thinking about nothingness in an aesthetic and meditative way—as if these hasty characterizations could define all thinkers and all currents of Chinese thought. An intercultural dialogue is constructed based on these definitions, established on a set of supposedly essential binaries, often based on otherness<sup>1</sup> and even on the impossibility of intercomprehension. That is why some propose that Chinese thought is only comprehensible to the Chinese, as if Chineseness was a monolithic

---

1 One only has to think of François Jullien's extensive production on the concept of "otherness" to define China in the eyes of Westerners. Jullien's argumentative method is to take a Chinese author and make him an emblem of the civilization itself, then follow a process of "difference" or "otherness" in relation to the West, in turn schematized according to a monofocal definition. On this see Billieter (2006) and Liu (2023).

fact/identity. The same would apply to Western thought, of course, which somehow necessarily considers other ways of thinking inferior on the strength of its own enduring (post)colonial heritage. In this way, Chinese thinkers affirm or deny, according to their own cultural and political agendas, whether or not this tradition belongs to the consensus of philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Either belonging in order to be of equal standing (in Hegelian terms, the pinnacle of history and thought), or not belonging in order to claim one's own (normally absolutized) otherness. On the Western side, phases of multicultural openness alternate with a natural ethnocentric tendency masked by presumed universalism, which wants philosophy to be a self-contained dialogue on closed and established given principles (of reason).<sup>3</sup>

Against this drift oscillating between ethnocentric absolute alterities and universalizing identities, intercultural and cross-cultural philosophical studies have offered many strategies and forms of compensation. Underlying this is an unquestionable claim to the natural diversity of culture that is realized in a wide range of forms of reason, argumentation and thought production. This procedure breaks down the ethnocentric position with regard to an ethno-polycentrism of philosophical reason. This breach of ethnic boundaries is certainly productive but, in turn, risks reconstructing polarizations between different forms of thought that are connected to unambiguous identities of each ethnic and linguistic group. What we instead aim to attempt in this article is the questioning of the monolithic nature of these identities through intercultural dialogue. We will take an opponent of Chinese nothingness and an advocate of Western nothingness to demonstrate the relevance of this issue in both civilizations, while also breaking the imposed canons. What we propose to do, therefore, is to bring into dialogue an author from a Western minor canon with an author from a Chinese minor canon. The former is a negative theologian, an ancient but minor current in the European tradition, while the latter is a philosopher of energy (*qixue* 氣學), opposed to both of the two major schools of his time (the school of patterning *lixue* 理學 or Cheng-Zhu and the school of heart-mind *xinxue* 心學 or Lu-Wang). We will see how a dialogue between minor canons can sometimes be more fruitful in creating exchange and contradicting the monolithic assumptions of identity that construct incommunicability, since minor canons question the “us and them” perspective.

2 The editorial production in this regard is extremely extensive, and to show the vitality of the argument we quote only the very telling title of a book by Zhang Huanmin 張喚民 *Has China a Philosophy? No! China has Only a Chinese Language Deceiving Art at the Service of Government* (2021) which shows the very practice of strong self-orientalism following to a very restricted and self-excluding definition of what “philosophy” is supposed to be.

3 See the now classical reference of Van Norden (2017).

## Wang Fuzhi's Nothingness

Feng Youlan, in his seminal *History of Chinese Philosophy*, completely omits Wang Fuzhi 王夫之, as his works had been censored during the Qing dynasty, turned in manuscript copies, and were only published in full in the half of the 19th century and became widespread one century later. In modern historiography, Wang Fuzhi's thought was immediately qualified as materialist, which brought him a certain amount of credit in 1950s communist China, often heavily influencing the interpretation of his thought. Chan Wing-tsit (1963) himself, although criticizing the communist interpretation, qualifies it as "materialist". Since the late 1980s, Tu Weiming (1998) harshly rejected this definition, while Jacques Gernet (2005) avoids the term altogether. Finally, among the more recent scholars, we can mention Nicholas Brasovan (2017, 65) who tries to reconcile these positions, suggesting a revision of the concept of materialism linked to the energy principle of *qi* 氣,<sup>4</sup> noting that these forces connect the material aspect to a profound spiritual, creative and vital dimension that cannot be reduced to mere material substance. We have reported these different positions in order to show how Wang's discourse in Chinese historiography is exceptionally complex and contradictory. He was born, educated and became an official under the Ming dynasty. He led the resistance against the Manchurian invaders who established the Qing dynasty, considering this power illegitimate and unworthy of Chinese civilization. His battle against the Manchurians led him to leave public office and retire to private life, where he produced a vast and complex body of thought. He considers Daoist and Buddhist influences on officials and government as the main reasons for the collapse of the Ming.

Wang Fuzhi's thought is connected to that of Zhang Zai 張載 (1020–1078), to whom he devoted some of his works. The latter's thought had already been partly eclipsed by the dominant opposition between the *li* and *xin* schools in the later Song and, above all, Ming epoch. The fact that in the Qing era, Wang not only took neither side but rejected them both as too permeated with Buddhism placed him outside the general discourse of his age, and drove him to assume an iconoclastic and often acrimonious position towards his historical period. As with many Ruist<sup>5</sup> authors from the Song onwards, at the centre of his reflection we find

---

4 We feel it necessary to emphasize the wide range of meanings covered by the concept of *qi*. *Qi* indicates both energy (physical and spiritual) and the breath of life (continuous and non-original), but it also constantly indicates the flow of life (blood, respiratory, hydraulic, etc.), the force itself that that energy possesses, and, it names the vitality of the whole cosmos. See Rošker (2018, 132–36).

5 We use the terms Ruism and Ruist instead of Confucianism or Confucian because in the Chinese tradition no school has ever been named after the master Confucius (Kongzi 孔子.) The school we call Confucian in Western languages is called *rujia* 儒家 or *rujiao* 儒教 from which we derive Ruism and Ruist. We believe that the repeated use of the term Confucianism makes us lose sight

the principle of change and transformation, read through the *Classic of Changes*, and a purely immanentist perspective. For him, everything is *qi* 氣, and *qi* and *li* 理 are inseparable.<sup>6</sup> There can be no precedence between them, as they are coessential. In the following we present a valid description of the inseparability of *li* and *qi* in Wang's words:

[正蒙] 天地之氣，雖聚散，攻取百塗，然其為理也順而不妄。  
 『注』聚則見有，散則疑無，既聚而成形象，則才質性情各依其類。同者取之，異者攻之，故庶物繁興。各成品彙，乃其品彙之成各有條理。故露雷霜雪各以其時，動植飛潛各以其族，必無長夏霜雪、嚴冬露雷、人禽艸木互相淆雜之理。（ZMZ 2011a, chap. *Taihe* 太和, 19)

Zhang Zai: The energy [*qi*] of the cosmos, albeit condensation and dispersion, appropriation and diversification, follows its own patterning [*li*] and does not ramble. Wang: When [*qi*] condenses, it is visible; when it disperses, it raises some doubts about its existence; when aggregated, it takes a shape that corresponds to a specific category from the point of view of the material [*zhi* 質],<sup>7</sup> natural tendency [*xing* 性],<sup>8</sup> and feeling [*qing* 情]. [Forms] that belong to the same category choose themselves, [forms] from different categories confront, because there are diverse feelings and ambitions for each being. Every completion [of energy] becomes a living being, so every living being has its own characteristics. Dew, thunder, frost and snow have their right time; terrestrial animals, plants, flying beings and fishes belong to their species. During summertime, it cannot freeze or snow, and during winter, there are no dew or thunderstorms. Humans, beasts, grass, and plants must not confuse their own patterning (*li*).<sup>9</sup>

In this cosmological framework of forces of tendency and attraction, *li* is visible through the transformations of *qi* and provides the patterning of transformation. There is a pure energetic immanence in which everything is *qi*, and nothing is

---

of two fundamental aspects: Confucius is not the first master of this school and he refers to an earlier tradition (to which he certainly has a great influence on); it is a very complex, broad and often fragmented school, built more by imperial historiographers (with specific and changing agendas) than by factual reality.

6 See Tan (2024) for an excellent and more extended introduction to Wang Fuzhi's thought.

7 *Zhi* 質 is the material form of *qi* 氣 after transformation or differentiation (*hua* 化).

8 *Xing* 性 means the natural inclination that guides our life, the moral and harmonious perfection (different for each being or creature).

9 In this article, all translations from Chinese and Latin are our own.

outside of it; the cosmos, the inseparable union of *qi* and *li*, is spontaneous, auto-poietic, auto-regulative, and non-purposive (see Brasovan 2017, 33). By non-purposive we mean not bound to a will that is other than the energetic dimension itself. There is no mind capable of producing a will that imposes itself on the matter, but rather, matter exercises its own direct agency. We might ask at this point in this apparent “metaphysics of the fullness”, what place there might be for nothingness and emptiness?

Wang Fuzhi defines his own thought in contrast to the Buddhists, Daoists and Ruists of the Song and Ming eras. Of the Daoists, he denounces the tendency to want to naturalize the human, projecting a superiority of nature to which man should align himself or submit. Daoists would tend towards an emptying out that would have dramatic family and social consequences, pushing towards the desocialization and isolation of the person, in open contrast with values such as a sense of justice *yi* 義 and human relations *wulun* 五倫. For Daoists, the *wu* 無 dimension of the *Dao* 道 would be more relevant than the *qi* dimension, characterized by the continuous *yin* 隱 and *yang* 陽 movement. However, the Buddhists are Wang Fuzhi’s bitterest adversaries, as they would focus their attention precisely on the annihilation of energetic and material reality as an illusion, and they aim at an ideal state, which Wang defines as transcendent, which is the empty *kong* 空 or *xu* 虛. A state of inaction (*nirvāṇa* or *niepan* 涅槃), in which energy would be extinguished and achieving that state would be the only ambition for practitioners. The attainment of the state of emptiness is a transcendent otherness. The social consequences that would follow are even worse than those of the Daoists. If Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824), in his denunciations against the Buddhists, had always emphasized the dimension of social and moral danger, for Wang Fuzhi, the departure is cosmological. The annulment, the emptying of matter and meaning, would have dramatic effects already visible in the historical—then cosmological—decline of his epoch. In cosmological terms, while the Daoists advocate a state that can be defined as purely *yin* (i.e., retirement from activity), the Buddhists want to nullify any dynamism guiding the practitioners in a static vacuum (see Gernet 2005, 129–30). As for the (Neo-)Ruists, particularly of the Cheng-Zhu line, they are, in turn, accused of projecting the superiority of *li* 理 over *qi* 氣 as a result of an indirect adherence to a transcendent vision that would place the immanent one below a transcendent dimension.

Nothingness and emptiness are evidently two slippery and dangerous concepts for our author, but in line with the Chinese tradition whereby what you want to control you cannot help but *he* 合 or integrate (whereas if you leave it out of your system it grows out of control), Wang incorporates the discourse pertaining nothingness and emptiness into his cosmology and does so at the level of the *taiji*

太極, the supreme ultimate, which is seen as immanent, a perpetual state in the manifestation of energy. *Taiji* is the original structure, the *benti* 本體, the basis on which the world/*qi* manifests through *yin-yang*. This continuously present state of matter, before the constantly active differentiation, is also supreme peacefulness, *taihe* 太和. It is not a demiurgic state that is chronologically before the manifestation of the world but a constantly present state that guarantees the manifestation and change of *qi*. It is not directly visible but is what the sage arrives at through the study of reality and intuition. Nothingness or vacuity is the state of undifferentiation between the constant states of transformation. Nothingness has nothing transcendent about it, it does not escape change but is introduced into the chain by change. Wang explicates this in two ways, one linguistic of Zhuangzian derivation, and one cosmological, of Zhou Dunyi's (周敦頤, 1017–1073) derivation through Zhang Zai.

He interprets nothingness as a term of negation when he says, “to negate it is to establish its emptiness and non-emptiness”.<sup>10</sup> Every affirmation requires a negation, and vice versa. In a completely different context, introducing his commentary on the *Daxue* 大學, he states:

惟其有是無非，故非者可現；若原有非，則是非無所折衷矣。非不對是，非者非是也。如人本無病，故知其或病或愈。若人本當有病，則方病時亦其恆也，不名為病矣。（DSS 2011c, *Daxue xu*, 393–94).

when there is ‘affirmation’ and ‘negation’ is negated, is when ‘negation’ becomes visible. If there was [but] ‘negation’ at the beginning, the succession of ‘affirmation-negation’ could not show. ‘Negation’ does not oppose ‘affirmation’, ‘negation’ negates ‘affirmation’. As when a human is not ill, we can thus know both illness and healing. If humans had always been ill, the moment of illness would be constant and it would be impossible to discern illness.

Thus, negation is a quality inseparable from affirmation; there is no one without the other, just as there is no *li* without *qi*. By negating we imply affirming, and vice versa.

This same consideration holds true at the cosmological level, since the ultimate vacuity, the *taixu* 太虛, is implicated in the progress of energy's change. Commenting on Zhang Zai, whose view of *qi* and nothingness he shares, he states:

10 “無他，虛與不虛而已矣。” (ZT, 499)

[張著] 氣之為物，散入無形適得吾體，聚為有象不失吾常。[王著] 散而歸於太虛，復其網緼之本體，非消滅也。聚而為庶物之生，自網緼之常性，非幻成也。[...] [張著] 太虛不能無氣，氣不能不聚而為萬物。萬物不能不散而為太虛。循是出入，是皆不得已而然也。[王著] 氣之聚散，物之死生，出而來，入而往，皆理勢之自然，不能已止者也。不可據之以為常，不可揮之而使散，不可挽之而使留。是以君子安生安死，于氣之屈伸無所施其作為，俟命而已矣。(ZMZ 2011a, *Taihe*, 20)

Zhang Zai: ‘*Qi* creates all beings, while dispersing it loses the forms but maintains its own structure [*ti* 體], while condensing into forms it does not lose its constant [movement]’. Wang: ‘Dispersing energies turns back to ultimate vacuity [太虛] to its original condensed harmonious state [*yinyun* 網緼] without annihilation [非消滅]. Equally, when it produces the various being, this condensed harmonious state is not deleted as an illusion. [...]’. Zhang: ‘the ultimate vacuity is not without *qi*, *qi* can’t help but produce all beings and all beings cannot escape from dispersing and turning back to ultimate vacuity. Complying with this cycle of entering and exiting is without alternative for all beings.’ Wang: ‘The dispersion and gathering of *qi* correspond to the death and birth of beings, their coming and going, entering and exiting. This is the natural patterning of all, which can’t be stopped. It is impossible to make of a [momentary] condition a perpetual state, neither scattering [energies] for securing a state of dispersion nor grasping [energies] for securing a state of gathering. The noble wise human lives and dies peacefully, because he/she adheres to the flexions and extensions of *qi* following its activity; this is his/her mandate [*ming* 命].’

Wang Fuzhi therefore rejects the cosmological version of the *Dao De Jing* 道德經 derived from Han interpretations whereby there would be a cosmogonic sequence, from *Dao* 道 to one, from one to two, from two to three until the totality of beings. This process for Wang, and earlier for Zhang Zai, is a pure constant process, contemplating annihilation or vacuity as a necessary state in the perpetual cyclicity of energy. Vacuity is not a goal to be achieved, not a state superior to ordinary cognition or a transcendent elsewhere. Wang Fuzhi, in innumerable passages of his works, rails against the current use of the term *taixu* 太虛 to define a guiding principle in meditation or action, since the only principle that should never be lacking among sages is the awareness of the renewing and perfecting capacity of *tian* 天 (Heaven/sky), the true model of *li* and therefore of action. While commenting on the *Zhongyong* 中庸, he denounces that Ruist sages

should model themselves on “the Way of Heaven” which is authenticity (誠者天之道) rather than the emptiness of emptiness (DSS 2011c, *Zhongyong*, chap. 20, 529); they should study *tianyong* 天用 (the operative and functional aspect of the *tian*) and not limit themselves to the *tianli* 天理 (the structural aspect of the *tian*), because the two are inseparable. What Buddhists and Daoists have done is to reject the functional dimension (*yong* 用) in favour of the constitutive structure (*ti* 體) alone, without realizing that the latter empties itself of all reality and meaning without the former.<sup>11</sup> In line with this, he states that the *Zhongyong* 中庸 mostly discusses the “functional aspects” (*yong*), and that only in that way it can present the “structural aspects” (*ti*).

According to Wang, this is something that many Ruists no longer understand, blinded by an emptiness or nothingness that excludes the fullness or energy, seen as the place of the illusory. Instead, the authenticity of Heaven, the authenticity of the cosmos, must be apprehended by composing the two dimensions *yong* and *ti*, precisely in the *qi-li* union. Wang denounces the fashion (育流行) of seeking a “supreme vacuity that is obscure, unfathomable, and vacuous” (窅窅空之太虛), and thus incapable of expressing any indication of profound knowledge or socially appropriate behaviour. These are the lies orchestrated (捏謊) by Buddhists and Daoists (see DSS 2011c, *Zhongyong*, chap. 20, 529). These false indications lead one to seek a pure, calm and detached mind (*xin* 心), thus abandoning any indication of rightness (*zheng* 正), because rightness cannot be learnt in detachment, since it is based on “the moment, the context and the appropriate relationships, it has an effective reality and is not in a vacuum”.<sup>12</sup> Commenting on the chapter *tiandao* 天道 from the *Zhuangzi* he suggests that:

虛則無不可實也，靜則無不可動也。無不可實，無不可動，天人之合也。「運而無所積」，則謂之虛” (ZT 2011b, *Tiandao*, 507–08).

If there is emptiness, there is nothing that cannot realize; if there is quietness, there is nothing that cannot move. That nothing cannot be realized or that nothing is impossible is the harmony between humans and the cosmos. ‘Moving but without accumulating’ is what emptiness actually means.

Here Wang uses the expression “moving but without accumulating” which, in the original chapter by Zhuangzi, is related to *tiandao* 天道 (the Way of Heaven) to define its emptiness/nothingness. We thus understand how in our author’s discourse,

11 See Pastor (2010, 253), Chinese original text at pp. 338–39.

12 “則已有期、有留、有繫，實而不虛也。” (DSS 2011b, *Daxue*, chap 7.1, 420–21)

emptiness/nothingness is actually not only part of the cycle of energy, but is seen as a productive phase, in contrast to the current vulgate that saw it as annulment, otherness, inaction, interruption of the cycle of everything. We could gloss over it by saying that this emptiness/nothingness is very full and has potentiality.

### Charles de Bovelles' Nothingness

As summarized by Watson (2014, chap. 4, 5), the history of Greek-European philosophy has always contemplated the void in a thousand forms and dimensions—from Parmenides' fullness to the vacuum that allows the movement of atoms for Democritus and Lucretius. Aristotle is known to have rejected the void because nature abhors a vacuum, and because in the void, which is without density, movements/speed would be infinite. Infinity is unacceptable for Aristotle, while the finite is perfection. God is the unmoved mover of a finite cosmos (see also Sorensen 2022, chap. 4). In *Genesis*, it is clearly stated that God creates the world through the light that rejects the original darkness, the formless state, the absence that characterized the world before this act. As is well known, Aristotle's view of the finite would dominate during the Middle Ages, connected to geocentrism, in contrast to the view of the ancient Hermetic tradition (i.e., Trismegistus), which described the divine character as being a sphere with a centre in every place and without a closed circumference. The most relevant of the classical sources in contrast to Aristotelianism is in the corpus of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, who proposes a negative theology to obtain knowledge of God characterized by infiniteness. The meeting of the argument on infiniteness and negative theology found one of its first accomplished forms in the thought of the theologian Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464), who, while always keeping it as a hypothesis, theorized the infiniteness of the cosmos and the knowledge of God as “learned ignorance”. This infiniteness matured in the thought of Giordano Bruno (1548–1600), who saw infinite worlds to correspond to the infiniteness of God.<sup>13</sup> The void enters his discourse in connection with the infinite, since it is the guarantor of providing space for the infinite potential of God.

This long trail of thinkers from pre-Christian classicism and the Christian era<sup>14</sup> who escaped from the canon we normally associate with Western thought has undergone ups and downs, persecutions, condemnations at the stake, etc., at least until the

---

13 On the question of infinitude and the centrality of Nicholas of Cusa and Giordano Bruno, see the classic Lovejoy (2011, 111–21).

14 We could also mention John Scotus Erigena, Meister Eckhart, and St John of the Cross, among others.

Enlightenment.<sup>15</sup> But this “minor canon” is explanatory of the thought of nothingness and infinity in the Greek-European tradition. As representative of this long current on the borderline between philosophy, hermeticism and theology, we choose to focus in this article on the theologian Charles de Bovelles, in particular on certain sections of his *Liber de nihilo* (1510/11). De Bovelles is a follower of Nicholas of Cusa, from whom he inherits the discourse on “learned ignorance” and infiniteness, bringing it explicitly into the field of negative theology. But he is also a pupil of the humanism of the school of Lefevres d’Etaples (1455–ca. 1536), which made its own the Ficinian convergence between the Aristotle of physics and logic, and the Plato of metaphysics and the science of the divine. This convergence goes hand in hand with the attention to hermeticism and Neo-Platonism, and with Dionysian mysticism, which is one of the pivotal characteristics of the Renaissance.<sup>16</sup> Aristotle is the philosopher of reason applied to experience (physical, moral, juridical, and so on), while Plato and Platonism are for reaching the knowledge of the divine and the unfathomable (see Garin 1987). The learned Cusanian ignorance is combined with the “non-knowledge” declared by the Platonic Socrates.

Bovelles’ thought is unitarist, everything is unity, and only the fallen wills of the angel (namely the devil) and humans can contrast with this unitary perspective. Nature, which is not one with God, is not in unity and harmony with the rest, but neither with itself (see *De Sapiente* 1510, chap. 49). God is the guarantor of unity, peace and concord. The sage must develop a vision that does not only see outside his own skull by the light of the sun but sees outside and inside, like two pairs of eyes, worldly eyes and a human eyes, the first examining the outside without becoming slave to the senses, and the second seeing the inside. The idea that nature presents only second-degree knowledge, while inner knowledge is purer and less conditioned, is evident in this regard. Bovelles defines this vision with the term contemplative and the author’s mystical slant is indeed evident. The senses are the worldly eyes while the intellect is the human eyes. The human comes to the world through the worldly eyes and then withdraws to him/herself through the human eyes, so as to complete the cycle of his/her intellect (chap. 50). Having completed this journey in the intellect, humans can be in total unity with God.

This process of knowledge is actually a constant detachment from the senses towards a perception of profound oneness with God and consequently with the

---

15 With regard to the period after the Enlightenment, Watson (2014, 79) says: “After the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, alternative views were more a reaction to reason and the scientific rationalization of nature, the new guarantors of permanence, than to religious dogma, and came from artists rather than the religious, appearing in the uprush of Romanticism”.

16 From the Dionysian tradition, de Bovelles derives two main themes: the hierarchy of all beings and the dialectic of affirmation-negation in naming God (see Duclow 2020, 27).

world (through God). This process of self-emptying is, in a Cusanian key, a learned ignorance, hence an acceptance of the limitations of knowledge. It is not, however, a simple constatation of the gnoseological limits, but a mysticism of emptying, in which the human gains oneness with God through an ontological discourse of annulment. This is why the *De Sapiente*, the *Ars oppositorum* and the *Liber de nihilo* go hand in hand in a single scheme (moreover, they all date back to 1510 published in the same collection), that of the annulment of the object and the subject, whereby the human does not create him/herself in ego but unites with God through his/her own annulment. However, this annulment, as we have already mentioned, is not only gnoseological and mystical, but also ontological. And in this context Bovelles' discourse becomes dangerous, since God and nothingness are presented in constant proximity. God must cause an *adnihilatio nihil* in order to create the universe. Being and nothingness are, according to a scheme of dialectical opposition, in constant reciprocal alternation, without any Manichean vision. Thanks to nothingness, God is not a demiurge, as he does not inform an imperfect matter present, but opposes nothingness. As Magnard (2014, 16) suggests, nothingness is not only an ontological power but a force of inference, since from nothingness is deduced being and from being God.

In *Liber de nihilo*, Bovelles relates matter—to be understood as formless matter, not in the sense of *wu* 物 in Wang Fuzhi—to nothingness, since it is a being in potency, unaccomplished and imperfect. It is the first of beings in the chain of time and the last of beings in the chain of perfection. All beings rely on matter to exist, but matter relies on nothingness or non-being to be. Matter is, therefore, somewhere between being and nothingness, is and is not, since it is deprived of all differences, but it is being. Matter, on the edge of non-being, is thus the principle and power of all things, which can come to be because it lacked being before (chap. 1). God needed nothingness, since he is pure perfection and indivisible, so he could not create from his substance. But there was nothing apart from him in eternity and so he created from nothing. Here the discursive function of nothingness emerges. God created everything from nothingness or non-being, for from non-being one can extract being, but being non-being, nothingness is outside God who is fully being (chap. 4).

*Ubi enim nunc sunt & subsistunt omnia: nichil erat prius. & in eo nichilo recepta sunt omnia ex quo et facta sunt. Id est ex non ente & in non ente. [...] Est igitur quodlibet in nichilo: omne plenum in vacuo. Ens omne in non ente subsistens: atque in eo ut in quodam loco receptum.*  
(LN 1510, 68b)

Before all things came to exist and dwell, nothingness was already there. And they found their receptacle in the nothingness from which they were extracted. Hence, from non-entity and in non-entity. [...] Everything is thus composed in nothingness: everything that is full is contained in vacuity. Every being rests on non-entity: received into it as if it were a place.

Nothingness or non-being or non-entity, according to the author's terminological oscillation, serves as a place for the expression of being. It is the receptacle of existing, a space that produces the possibility of what emerges from this indistinct background into existence. It is described as an immense emptiness (*immenso vacuo*) which, due to its own emptiness, does not have to withdraw or modify itself in any way by receiving beings. This "place" was before time, so much so that it is infinite in being and action (*actum infinitum*) like God himself. Only nothingness, like God, cannot be limited, modified or annihilated by any being. But not even by God himself. For if God decided to suppress it and thus make it become from non-being to being, it would become equal to God and the divine power itself would be substituted and suppressed by another infinite act (chap. 6).

God is the supreme and absolute necessity, first cause and detached from everything, from whom everything proceeds and without whom nothing could be done. All beings, on the other hand, are possible but none of them is necessary—i.e., could not be and was not before being—or impossible – i.e., could have been and can be. Nothingness is not, but it would be a mistake to thus take it for an impossibility, since it is infinitely not-being and only being can be impossible. The impossible is potentially impossible, whereas nothingness is pure non-being which, if it were being, would nullify everything.

*Est igitur semper deus in esse! Nichil semper in non esse. Creature autem varie: quandoque esse & quandoque in non esse. Deus & nichil extrema sunt: simplicia & imutabilia. Creature vero medie/varie & mutationi obnoxie.* (LN 1510, 70b)

God is always in being. Nothingness is always in non-being. On the other hand, creatures change: sometimes they are in being, sometimes in non-being. God and nothingness are simple and unchanging. Creatures are in-between, subject to constant variations and mutations.

Table 1. Table of Subjects, Time and State (reproduced from LN 1510, 70b)

Who	Time	Ontological condition
God ( <i>Deus</i> )	Always ( <i>Semper</i> )	Is ( <i>Est</i> )
God ( <i>Deus</i> )	Never ( <i>Nunquam</i> )	Is not ( <i>Non est</i> )
Creature ( <i>Creatura</i> )	Sometimes ( <i>Aliquando</i> )	Is ( <i>Est</i> )
Creature ( <i>Creatura</i> )	Sometimes ( <i>Aliquando</i> )	Is not ( <i>Non est</i> )
<i>Nichil</i>	Always ( <i>Semper</i> )	Is not ( <i>Non est</i> )
<i>Nichil</i>	Never ( <i>Nunquam</i> )	Is ( <i>Est</i> )

As can be seen from the table, eternity—of always and never—is only of God (*Deus*) and nothingness (*Nichil*), while impermanence is of all creatures/beings. In this system, God and nothingness are the poles of a dynamic or transformative ontology, which finds, in the stasis of its extremes, its own harmonious balance. Creatures oscillate between being and non-being (or nothingness) continuously, and it is inherent in their nature to do so. It follows that nothingness is as necessary for God to be as it is for creatures to come into being and move from an eternal potentiality to a temporary act. Nothingness is defined as the immense and infinite non-being in act. Whereas God is infinite and immense being in act. Both, at this point, are equally necessary to guarantee existence. As the author makes clear by oscillating between ontological proof and discursive proof (i.e., inference):

*Sicut enim vere enunciamus homo est igitur deus est: ita & veraciter pronunciauimus nichil est/ igitur & homo est & deus est. Possibile est: igitur necesse est. Impossibile est: ergo & possibile & necessarium. Antecedit enim possibile necessario. Impossibile vero possibili & necessario. Necessarium autem ex possibili & ex impossibili infertur. Possibile vero ex impossibili.* (LN 1510, 70b)

Just as we correctly say that ‘man exists therefore God exists’, to the same extent we can equally correctly say that ‘nothing exists therefore God exists’. The existence of the possible implies that of the necessary, the existence of the impossible implies that of the possible and the necessary. The possible serves as an antecedent to the necessary. The impossible makes the possible and the necessary true. The necessary is inferred from the possible and impossible. The possible is inferred from the impossible.

It is, therefore, evident that nothingness is the guarantor of both possibility and impossibility, and both are necessary for each other. There is no possibility without impossibility, just as there is no impossibility without necessity. So God is the necessary, but his creatures are the possible; nothingness is the mediator of the possible, that which guarantees the non-necessity of the whole. God is fruitful in creation but, being full of his necessity, is not the guarantor of the possible. He could create nothing and still be perfect and necessary. The possible necessitates the impossible. This is both a consideration of the inferential power of nothingness and the actual genesis of the creation of the world from nothing (i.e., *creatio ex nihilo*).

This conception implies a preference on Bovelles' part for negative theology, since affirmative theology would descend from God to beings and then to nothingness, while negative theology from nothingness would ascend to beings and God. The proposed Renaissance cosmology of beings unfolds in seven degrees that negative theology would ascend. From the bottom: nothingness, matter, minerals, plants, animals, human beings, angels and God (see the picture). It is, therefore, thanks to negative theology that from nothingness one arrives at God, while affirmative theology tends to constrain God into definitions and then move towards the lowest levels of the chain. The infinitude and perfection of God necessitates retraction, the ablation of definitions (the apophatic way), the refuge in the learned ignorance of the wise man who knows the unknowability of God.

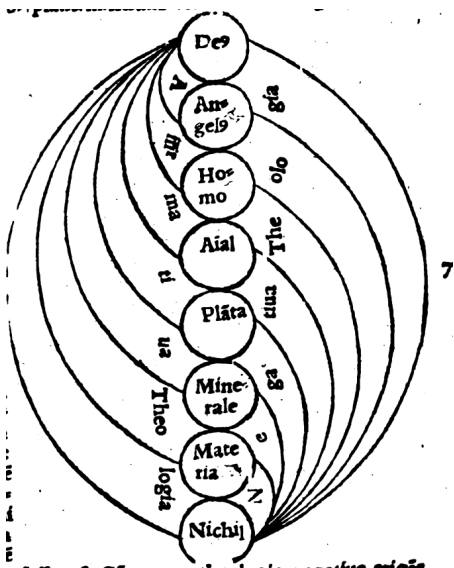


Figure 1. Affirmative and negative theologies throughout the cosmological seven degrees. (Image retrieved from LN 1510, 73b)

## Nothingness as the Cornerstone of Existence between China and Europe

The nothingness of de Bovelles has aspects that are very similar and very different to that of Wang Fuzhi, and we will try to identify both of them. Both authors certainly share in their cosmological system a centrality of nothingness, which could not be absent for the functionality of the whole. Without Wang's nothingness or emptiness, *qi* could not be transformative and would be a constant state of dualistic differentiation, so the cosmos would have two opposing energies and not a unifying one. For Bovelles, nothingness is necessary for the existence of God and all beings; without nothingness, God could not be eternal and constant, and beings would not be possible, since their possibility passes through nothingness. From this descends a second similarity: nothingness is constant, it is not enclosed in an original state, in a beginning stage and would then be annulled in being. For Wang, *taixu* is a constant aspect of *qi*, not a past state of it, which is why it is not inserted in a cosmogony but in a constant cosmology. If this function of nothingness is quite common in Asian visions, it is not the same for the Western major canon. In ancient Hermeticism and the Dionysian spirit, one finds such use of the concept of nothingness in a dialectical key or *ars oppositorum*. And it is precisely to this tradition that our French author refers. Nothingness and/or non-being is constantly implied and invoked by being. This is not only a negative theology, which uses the discursiveness and inferential capacity of non-being to reach the supreme being of God, but instead is also a cosmology, which places nothingness in the chain of beings, at a lower level if we go in the order of affirmation but at a higher level if we reverse the direction by continuing towards negation. And if from negation we go to affirmation, the reverse is also true. So from God we go to nothingness as from nothingness to God.

Another proximity is the intersection of cosmological discourse and linguistic discourse, which drives both authors to a distrust of affirmative language to reach the ultimate truth. Wang's *taixu* is implied in a discourse in which *wu* 無, namely negation, is never opposed (and thus annulled) by affirmation (*shi* 是), but is always implied by it and vice versa.<sup>17</sup> In the same way, for de Bovelles, nothingness is not the opposite of God, but rather is the high road to the knowledge of God, which is a learned ignorance.

For Bovelles, the nothingness of negative theology is necessary for the knowledge of God, but, in accordance with the Renaissance key, knowledge of the world is

---

17 On the vision on Chinese history of philosophy through the concept of *wu* 無, see Yu (2021, 54–57).

gained instead through affirmation. Herein lies the Ficinian dualism between the Aristotle of the worldly and the Plato of the divine. For Bovelles, God is the supreme truth, and the world is not the custodian of this integral truth. For Wang, on the other hand, since *li* 理 or patterning is immanent to energy (*qi*), there is no transcendent truth, there is no dualism or otherness between the world and something beyond the world. In this respect, it is evident how negative theology is actually closer to the position of Buddhism, whereby the truth of nothingness has its own transcendence, is an argumentative or cognitive elsewhere (interruption of thought), but also ontological, outside the illusion of matter. For Bovelles and Buddhism, worldliness is illusory and distances one from the supreme truth. For Wang, and for Neo-Ruists in general, truth is of and in the world. While Zhu Xi may suggest a priority of *li* over *qi*, this argument is never built on the qualitative difference or otherness between the two. Moreover, for Wang, truth is the world itself as transformation. This distance between the two authors is even more radical in the purpose of this cognitive journey of nothingness. Mystical in the case of Bovelles (as for the Buddhists), and instead political-moral for Wang Fuzhi. The modernity of the Neo-Ruist author places him at the basis of a secular and immanent historical perspective, in which history is the place of manifestation of the *li* and action of humankind to safeguard the cosmos and humanity (predominantly understood as Chinese civilization threatened by usurpers).<sup>18</sup>

Wang Fuzhi inserts nothingness into his treatment with the precise intention of removing it from the Buddhist field and preventing the latter's perspective from penetrating Ruism to any great extent. This is why he opposes mysticism and rejects all forms of transcendence, which in the Asian context is in any case a very relative transcendence compared to Christian theology. *Taixu*—which the Qing author inherits from Zhou Dunyi and Zhang Zai and systematizes—is no more or less a bearer of truth than energy, since it is energy itself. Energy, as a transformation that inseparably implies patterning (*li* 理), is truth if it is allowed to manifest and reconstructed on the basis of the authenticity (*cheng* 誠) of the whole. Authenticity and truthfulness are of this world, and man's task is precisely to trace them (i.e., study them), re-establish them and express them because being of the world, they are of humans too. Worldly and anthropological truth coincide in the unperturbed authenticity and truth of the cosmos.

It is precisely at the truth level even more than at the cosmological level that the greatest difference between the two systems lies. The Renaissance author sees truth as the prerogative of God. The world is the production of another force that does not pass itself into what it produces. The world is produced by God

---

18 On Wang Fuzhi's historical thought, see Rogacz (2020, 157–65).

from matter that is formless, worthless except for the divine creative breath. Humans are below the angels but above the world, they have limits but are closer to God compared to the rest of the world. The simple laws in the divine mind can be found in all that He has created but not its matter, for God has no matter as He is a pure being and matter is the closest to nothingness in the scale of beings. God is mind, the human is mind and matter, and while the world is matter, it is not mind, it is pure product. The matter of which the world is made is formless and nothingness, without truth unless provided by the divine otherness. Nothingness is therefore not the bearer of truth except in an inferential way, in order to reach God.

Ever since Plato, matter (or an entity) has been interpreted as a hybrid of being and non-being, a quasi-nothingness, since it is not like the static and perfect idea, but is in transformation and transformation is imperfection. Matter is, therefore, imperfection, lack, and is, therefore, loss in relation to true existence and truth. This degradation of matter converges with the broadly Greek ontology of *ex nihilo nihil fit*, for which nothingness is necessarily unproductive, so matter oscillates between the productivity of the idea that informs it and the unproductivity of its own mutability, which is degradation. This Greek perspective merges with the Judeo-Christian ontology of creation, *ex nihilo a Deo fit ens creatum*, two openly contradictory positions that medieval and modern theology constantly strives to converge with refined and creative solutions. In both cases, nothingness is deprived of its own meaning and agentivity. Matter is (almost) nothingness. To this discourse of matter as nothingness is added, as seen in Bovelles, the discourse on the nothingness of God. Since a negative theology, on these Neo-Platonic and Judeo-Christian foundations, brings nothingness back into play in the understanding of God, since in deprivation, which is a deprivation of the human cognitive dimension with respect to God, supreme knowledge (learned ignorance) can come. The human creature is nothing without God, since God gives it form and meaning. But it is also God himself who, as an absolute, cannot be an entity, a something, and thus the discourse falls into the metaphysical horror of God's nullity.<sup>19</sup>

This constantly necessitating and conflicting relationship with nothingness in Western thought, which, in spite of simplifications of convenience, has much thought about nothingness, stems from an assumption: the transformation of things in the world is constantly understood as transience and degradation, so the world needs to be saved by something that is not the world and that guarantees eternity, as anti-degradation. And it is here that we find the real furrow between

---

19 This paragraph is indebted to Necchi (2024).

de Bovelles and Wang Fuzhi. In Chinese cosmological thought, which Wang systematizes and orients towards *qi*, we find the highest expression of the ethical and aesthetic vision of the harmony of transformation. Transformation is not loss, and the eternal (*chang* 常 or *heng* 恆) does not serve to prevent transformation but is transformation itself. The wise human (*shengren* 聖人) is the one who facilitates transformation and participates in accomplishing a constant, cyclic phase of equilibrium that will not persist unless repeated by a perpetual line of other wise men.

Can we then say that Western thought has not brought truth into the world? That would be just as much of a simplification, since pantheist and hylozoist thought have always thought of a coincidence between the world and God, and therefore between the world and truth, resulting in, among other things, the coincidence of mind and matter, the desire for matter, the agentivity of matter, and so on. David of Dinant says: “the matter of the world is God himself, and the form that comes to matter is none other than God making himself sensible”.<sup>20</sup> David names the matter *mens*, it is the knowability/intelligibility of everything that exists: the matter of the bodies and of the thoughts is the same. God is transformation itself for this author who died at the stake in 1210. The same perspective of coincidence between God and the world, and therefore mind and matter, can be found in Giordano Bruno, equally burnt at the stake in 1600.

## Conclusions

The discourse on nothingness of the Western minor canons (negative theology, magical philosophy, mysticism, Dionysism, pantheism, etc.) has a precise *raison d'être* in the post-Aristotelian Greek-European world: to account for creation and, consequently, the efficient cause. The efficient cause is one of the most refined theological inventions of the West, born out of the need to make the Greek discourse on nothingness and the monotheistic creation from nothingness coincide (see Dattilo 2021, 140–45). The efficient cause is probably the greatest medieval innovation, with significant philosophical consequences. It posits as an absolute and omnipotent being an unlimited mind and intentionality, a kind of “supra-mind”. The fallout on the subject-object relationship is inevitable and posits this very mind as the model for the human mind and human living, with inescapable consequences on acting and interpreting/knowing the world.<sup>21</sup> Chinese

20 “Yle igitur mundi est ipse Deus, forma vero adveniens yle nil aliud quam id, quod facit Deus sensibile se ipsum.” Translation and original text from Dagron (2003, 24, 26).

21 Zyporyn (2024) provides an fascinating discussion on the topic of God, the mind and the world engaging Western authors such as Plato, Spinoza, Nietzsche and Bataille and the Chinese perspective of Daoism.

thought, on the other hand, did not need to establish the relationship between a transcendent “supra-mind” untouched by its actions and the object of its actions. Most Chinese thinkers interpreted the infinitude of the world (in its transformations), while the major canon of the Greek-Christian tradition maintained the Aristotelian necessity of the finiteness of the world, while also guaranteeing the infinitude of God. Hence God is not in what he creates and nothingness serves as a limit to the effects on the world of divine omnipotence. The infinitude of the world of the Chinese did not at this point necessitate nothingness to contain a God, but nothingness was expressed as the very power and infinitude of possibility. And this infinitude is particularly immanent and materialistic in Zhang Zai and Wang Fuzhi.

Nevertheless, David of Dinant, Nicholas of Cusa, Charles de Bovelles, Giordano Bruno and many others have for centuries expressed divergent thinking from that seen in what we consider to be the major European canon. They have thought what we risk improperly terming the unthought of the West up to contemporary post-modern and post-human evolutions, and/or what we exclusively attribute to thoughts defined as “others”. Chinese thought certainly has its own diversity, its own infinite richness and resources, but it does not think the unthought of the West. And the same holds true in reverse. Such an “otherness perspective” has a number of risks: imagining the other always in relation to me (positively or negatively), leaving as an assumption a me that was not, suggesting an implicit ethnic-cultural opposition, and so on. And the consequences of this attitude can be significant socially, culturally, as well as politically and economically in a globalized world.

With this article, we have attempted to bring into dialogue two minor canons on the theme of nothingness, addressing it outside the mainstream through two presumably unrepresentative authors so as to constantly re-discuss and dwell on the fertile boundaries—*ji* 際 in Wang Fuzhi’s conception—between civilizations.

## References

### Primary Sources

- Bovelles de, Charles (Caroli Boulli). 1510. “Liber de nihilo (Book of Nothingness).” In *Que hoc volumine continentur Liber de intellectu, Liber de sensu, Liber de nihilo, Ars oppositorum, De sapiente ... (This Volume Includes: Book of the Intellect, Book of the Senses, Book of Nothingness, Art of the Oppositions, The Wiseman...)*, 63b–77b. Paris: Rd. Henri Estienne. [https://www.google.it/books/edition/Que\\_hoc\\_volumine\\_continentur\\_Liber\\_de\\_in/K6\\_7jngJVP0C?hl=it&gbpv=0](https://www.google.it/books/edition/Que_hoc_volumine_continentur_Liber_de_in/K6_7jngJVP0C?hl=it&gbpv=0).
- Wang, Fuzhi 王夫之. 2011a. *Zhangzi zheng meng zhu* 張子正蒙注 (*Annotated Commentary to Master Zhang’s Zhengmeng*). In *Chuanshan quanshu* 船山全書 (*Complete Works of Wang Chuanshan*), vol. 12, 7–397. Changsha: Yuelu Publishing House.
- . 2011b. *Zhuangzi tong* 《莊子通》 (*Understanding of the Zhuangzi*). In *Chuanshan quanshu* 船山全書 (*Complete Works of Wang Chuanshan*), vol. 13, 491–521. Changsha: Yuelu Publishing House.
- . 2011c. *Du sishu daquanshuo* 讀四書大全說 (*Reading the Compendium of Discourses on the Four Books*). In *Chuanshan quanshu* 船山全書 (*Complete Works of Wang Chuanshan*), vol. 16, 391–1146. Changsha: Yuelu Publishing House.

### Secondary Sources

- Billieter, Jean-François. 2006. *Contre François Jullien (Against François Jullien)*. Paris: Éditions Allia.
- Bovelles de, Charles. 1987. *Il libro del sapiente (The Book of the Wiseman)*. Torino: Einaudi.
- . 2014. *Le livre du néant (The Book of Nothingness)*. Translated by Pierre Magnard. Paris: Vrin
- . 2024. *Il piccolo libro del nulla (The Booklet of Nothingness)*. Translated by Piercarlo Necchi. Milano: Luni Editrice.
- Brasovan, Nicholas. 2017. *Neo-Confucian Ecological Humanism and Interpretative Engagement with Wang Fuzhi (1619–1692)*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Chan, Wing-tsit. 1963. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Dagron, Tristan. 2003. “David of Dinant—On the Quaternuli Fragment <Hyle, Mens, Deus>.” *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 40 (4): 419–36. <https://shs.cairn.info/journal-revue-de-metaphysique-et-de-morale-2003-4-page-419?lang=en>.

- Dattilo, Emanuele. 2021. *Il dio sensibile. Saggio sul panteismo (The Sensitive God. Essay on Pantheism)*. Vicenza: Neri Pozza.
- Duclow, Donald F. 2020. "Charles de Bovelles on God, Nihil and Negative Theology." *Aither* 23 (7): 24–38. <https://doi.org/10.5507/aither.2020.003>.
- Feng Youlan. 1952-1953. *A History of Chinese Philosophy*. Translated by Derk Bodde. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Garin, Eugenio. 1987. "Introduzione (Introduction)." In Charles Bovelles, *Il libro del sapiente (The Book of the Wiseman)*, VII–XXIX. Torino: Einaudi.
- Gernet, Jacques. 2005. *La raison des choses. Essai sur la philosophie de Wang Fuzhi (1619-1692) (The Reason of Things. Essays on Wang Fuzhi's (1619–1692) Philosophy)*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Liu, Joyce C. H. 2023. "Re-Reading Zhang Taiyan Against François Julien: Ontology and Political Critique in Chinese Thought." *Theory, Culture & Society* 40 (4-5): 1–18 (Special issue "Against Ontology: Chinese Thought and François Jullien").
- Lovejoy, Arthur O. 2011 (1936). *The Great Chain of Being*. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Magnard, Pierre. 2014. "Introduction. Le retour du négatif (Introduction: The Way Back of the Negative)." In Charles de Bovelles, *Le livre du néant (The Book of Nothingness)*, 7–40. Paris: Vrin.
- Necchi, Piercarlo. 2024. "Postfazione. Il nome del nulla (Postface: The Name of Nothingness)." In Charles de Bovelles, *Il piccolo libro del nulla (The Booklet of Nothing)*, 117–43. Milano: Luni Editrice.
- Pastor, Jean-Claude. 2010. *Éléments pour une lecture du Siwenlu Neipian de Wang Fuzhi. Analyse des notions philosophique et traduction (Tools for an Investigation on Wang Fuzhi's Siwenlu Neipian. Analysis of the Philosophical Notions and Translation)*. Paris: Éditions You Feng Libraire & Éditeur.
- Rogacz, Dawid. 2020. *Chinese Philosophy of History. From Ancient Confucianism to the End of the Eighteenth Century*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Rošker, Jana. 2018. "The Concept of Qi in Chinese Philosophy: A Vital Force of Cosmic and Human Breath." In *Atmospheres of Breathing*, edited by Lenart Škof, and Petri Berndtson, 127–40. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Sorensen, Roy. 2022. *Nothing. A Philosophical History*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tan, Mingran. 2024. "Wang Fuzhi's Confucian System." In *Chinese Philosophy and Its Thinkers: From Ancient Times to the Present Day*, edited by Selusi Ambrogio and Dawid Rogacz, vol. II (*Chinese Imperial Philosophy after Buddhism*), 403–22. London: Bloomsbury.
- Tu, Weiming. 1998. "The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature." In *Confucianism and Ecology: The Interrelation of Heaven, Earth, and Hu-*

- mans*, edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Berthrong, 105–22. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Van Norden, Bryan W. 2017. *Taking Back Philosophy: A Multicultural Manifesto*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Watson, Gay. 2014. *A Philosophy of Emptiness*. London: Rektion Books.
- Yu, Xuanmeng 俞宣孟. 2021. “Jieshu yibang tangeng xunyuan 結束依傍，探根尋源 (Ending Dependence on the Pattern of Western Philosophy and Searching for the Original Assumption of Philosophy).” *Zhexue fensi 哲學分析 (Philosophical Analysis)* 12 (5): 40–57.
- Zhang, Huanmin 張喚民. 2021. *Zhongguo you zhaxue ma? No! Zhongguo zhi you zhengzhi fuwu de hanzi huyou shu 中國有哲學嗎？No！中國只有政治服務的漢字忽悠術 (Has China a Philosophy? No! China has Only a Chinese Language Deceiving Art at the Service of Government)*. Xinbeishi: Baqi wenhua chuban.
- Ziporyn, Brook. 2024. *Experiments in Mystical Atheism. Godless Epiphanies from Daoism to Spinoza and Beyond*. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press.