

***Selling Yoga: From Counterculture to Pop Culture.* By Andrea Jain. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. xx + 240 pp. \$19.95.**

Raechel Lutz
Rutgers University

When did yoga become cool? How can we explain its proliferation in modern popular culture? What roots, if any, does modern postural practice have in ‘ancient’ yoga? These questions form the heart of Andrea Jain’s *Selling Yoga: From Counterculture to Pop Culture*. Jain leads the reader on a thought-provoking intellectual journey through the complex social, economic, and cultural practices that have shaped modern postural yoga.

To answer these questions, Jain builds on George Marcus’s (1995) work in anthropological ethnographic methodologies: Marcus explored different approaches to fieldwork that could accommodate cultural meanings that are mobile and fluid (Jain 2015, xii). Marcus argued a multi-sited interdisciplinary investigation would necessarily deviate in form and content from the grounded local studies of traditional anthropology (Marcus 1995). In this vein, Jain does not use a traditional participant observer or empirical data methods based in a specific locality. Instead, she uses the methodological fluidity implied by Marcus’s suggestions to shape her investigation of a contemporary yoga practices. Capitalism, industrialization, globalization, and transnationalism have diffused consumer culture, as well as the practice of postural yoga, across the globe. Recognizing that “contemporary popular culture defies the ability to locate any cultural object at one site of even several sites,” Jain’s analysis follows postural yoga through connections between practitioners and consumers as well as to their websites and publications (Jain 2015, xiii). Jain compares these sources over different times and places in her attempt to argue for postural yoga’s heterogeneity and historical contingency.

Modern postural yoga, she argues, is the result of entwined global processes of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Jain asserts that within the context of the growth of consumer capitalism in the mid-late twentieth century, modern postural yoga is not, in fact, a shallow compilation of borrowed ideas stolen from a lost era, which only loosely holds onto authentic meaning or purpose. Disregarding the complexity of modern yoga’s roots, she asserts, “would undermine the ontological, axiological, narrative, and ritual functions and meanings of postural yoga” (Jain 2015, xv). Throughout her book, Jain argues that modern postural practice is complex, multifaceted, and adaptable. Popular postural yoga practices deserve, and here receive, scholarly attention.

Both Chapters One and Two set the stage for the arrival of modern, consumer-based postural yoga. In Chapter One, Jain argues that pre-modern yoga, defined temporally as the period before the nineteenth century, is “radically distinct” from contemporary yoga, and was socially and religiously contingent, often existing in a variety of different forms, including Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist versions of yoga (Jain 2015, 2). Her analysis relies on a number of other works, including that of Mark Singleton and Elizabeth De Michelis, to disrupt the presumed linearity of the transmission of yogic knowledge over the course of centuries (De

Michelis 2005; Singleton 2010). Her chapter argument – that modern yoga does not follow directly from ancient yogic knowledge and practices – is an important piece of her story, however, the chapter reads more like a literature review than original research. In Chapter Two, Jain explains how emerging forces of globalization and a growing transnational consumer culture between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries transformed yoga. Jain investigates controversial figures, like Ida A. Craddock and her studies in mystic and erotic Tantra, whose work reshaped yoga to better fit a modernizing capitalist world. However, she argues, these practices were labeled as elite, countercultural, or controversial, and so yoga practitioners remained a small fragment of global consumers.

Chapters Three and Four establish yoga as a feature of popular culture in the twentieth century and represent the core of Jain's historical intervention. Chapter Three describes how yoga practices became popular in the 1960s and 1970s – a major turning point in her narrative. Three factors combined to set the stage for yoga's rise to mass consumer consciousness. First, increased mobility through new transportation technologies enabled students, teachers, and artisans to travel, and spread their ideas and goods. Then a broad-based disillusionment with organized, traditional religious institutions caused many people to search for new spiritual practices. Lastly, postural yoga used the ideas and practices of consumer culture to reshape itself to a twentieth century audience without critiquing pop culture as other systems, like Siddha Yoga and Transcendental Meditation, did. Instead, postural yoga fit with consumer culture and was not perceived as a threat to it (Jain 2015, 43). Consumers could choose between different styles and types of practice in a heterogeneous market where teachings were accessed directly, quickly, and unobtrusively. Increased consumption of yoga and its products firmly established yoga as part of popular culture.

Chapter Four is an analysis of the diversification of late-twentieth century yoga practices. Strategic branding replaced the authority historically conveyed by traditional lineages. Jain traces the recreation of postural yoga through the four steps of brand image management – selection, introduction, elaboration, and fortification – within Iyengar and Siddha Yoga. She then analyzes the creation of second-generation yoga branding with a case study on John Friend's Anusara Yoga, but Jain does not address the scandal that has plagued the organization since 2012. Overall, this branding strategy and the resulting diversification of yoga products cater to, as Jain puts it, “the dominant physical and psychological self-developmental desires and needs of many contemporary consumers” (Jain, 2015, 94). In so doing, branding created a more permanent place for yoga in contemporary popular culture.

Chapters Five and Six are intriguing, argumentative investigations of the consequences of Jain's research. She takes a strong stance in Chapter Five by arguing that modern postural practice is a form of religion. She debates the issue thoroughly, arguing for yoga's “profoundly religious qualities” such as sacred practices, communal beliefs concerning suffering and death, and a shared worldview reinforced through practiced rituals (Jain 2015, 98). In Chapter Six, she forcefully and convincingly engages critics of yoga who contend that Christians should fear modern yoga in part because it spreads Hindu doctrine. Jain is suspicious of these critics' tendency to essentialize yoga, positioning it as a set of static, linear beliefs and practices. She gives her research as proof of the fallacy behind their thinking. These two chapters demand close attention and offer the most to scholars already familiar with the subject matter because of her well-researched and passionate responses to postural yoga's critics

Selling Yoga may have benefited from a clearer discussion about how race fits into the establishment of yoga in popular culture. How have America's racial logics informed discussions

about yoga practices throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? For example, Kate Imy's recent article on the relationship between fascism and the acceptance of yogic traditions by British soldiers in India explores how the physical benefits of yoga enabled the cooption of the tradition's postures to reinforce British masculinity (Imy 2016). Regardless of this untapped potential point of expansion, the book does important work toward helping to situate popular postural yoga in a historical context.

Jain's *Selling Yoga* is an entertaining and provocative read. The book champions the idea that popular cultural practices are worthy of critical and historiographical attention. Her clear logic and deft organizational skills make *Selling Yoga* a significant investigation of the deeper historical, cultural, social, and economic contextualization of popular yoga practice. Making yoga cool, it seems, wasn't simple or easy. Some of the most ambitious and motivated champions of postural yoga worked hard to sell a generation of consumers on the benefits of backbends. Jain's in-depth analysis of the history of modern postural yoga deserves a read by scholars and yogis alike.

References

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Raechel Lutz is a Ph.D. candidate in History at Rutgers University and is writing a dissertation that investigates the environmental history of oil refining in New Jersey.