

***Routledge Handbook of Yoga and Meditation Studies*. Edited by Suzanne Newcombe and Karen O'Brien-Kop. London: Routledge, 2021. 544 pages. \$56.95**

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The *Routledge Handbook of Yoga and Meditation Studies*, edited by Suzanne Newcombe and Karen O'Brien-Kop, offers 34 chapters divided into five parts, each with several chapters addressing multiple perspectives. The handbook demonstrates the vital work that is needed to shift academic discussions towards the multifaceted layers and complexities in the practice and scholarly understanding of yoga. By intertwining perspectives from yoga and meditation studies, several distinct and nuanced delineations, and newer directions, emerge. The diverse academic voices from Korea, Latin America, and Japan spark new flavors into the debate, and the exploration of living traditions within India amplify marginal voices.

In Part I, Suzanne Newcombe and Karen O'Brien-Kop raise the question of whether the categories of yoga and meditation reproduce the Eurocentric reductive or Cartesian duality. This sets the context for highlighting the need for recognition of biases present in historical research, cultural policies, and limitations of textual interpretations of a living tradition. Shameem Black highlights the role of yoga as an alternative form of knowing but notes that the “price of admission for such decolonizing work can be the severing of such contemplative practices from religious and devotional frameworks” (19). This is an important point as yoga and meditation are inseparably inscribed inside a larger worldview within several cultural formulations. Ville Husgafvel calls for more rigorous methodological standards in the historical and comparative study of contemporary mindfulness while Mark Singleton and Borayin Larios write about the complex position of the scholar-practitioner of yoga, the post-lineage subculture, and transnational practices. Andrea Jain examines the relationship between yoga and the dominant modes of governance in neoliberal capitalist society in “Neoliberal Yoga.” Jain uses these deeper observations to illuminate the problems of conforming to the ideologies that perpetuate exploitation, environmental destruction, and social inequalities.

Part II takes a closer look at the contexts in which yoga and meditation practices developed in South Asia using a range of methodologies. Kengo Harimoto uses a philological approach to traverse the *Upaniṣads* through the eyes of Śaṅkara, arguing that *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* functions as a syncretic text where three strands of philosophy – *Sāṃkhya*, philosophy of the Sanskrit grammarians and modified Buddhist tenets – are woven together. Florin Deleanu uses primary sources representative of the traditions of *Śrāvakayāna*, *Mahāyāna* and *Vajrayāna* to provide an overview of meditative praxis and systems of spiritual cultivation in Buddhist Meditation. Olga Serbaeva Saraogi transects the yogic elements in the *Vidyāpīṭha* tantric texts and proposes that the “early *Śaiva-Śākta* tantras probably constitute the missing link between Pātañjala yoga and what came to be known as *haṭhayoga*” (102). Raphaël Voix uses an ethnohistorical lens to argue that there is a feedback loop in the philosophical extensions of yoga and meditation into everyday practice, and the practitioners’ situatedness within particular

historical/sociological contexts. Taken together, these are astute and important studies that can mark the resilience and transpositions of consciousness in time. Mark Singleton, Julian Strube, and Suzanne Newcombe in their respective chapters lean into contemporary rhetorics in yoga and meditation both in the global context and within Indian government initiatives for physical and mental well-being.

Part III covers the notions of technique as understood in context-specific religious traditions. Samani Pratibha Pragma traces influences of Hindu tantra literature and Patanjali Yogasutra in the medieval period and notes the amalgamation of scientific and psychological theories in the modern period. Louis Komjathy suggests a revisionist framework to engage in a more neutral and integrated manner with Daoism. Patrick J. D'Silva discusses Muslim engagement with yoga and meditation asserting the independent existence of Muslim contemplative and meditative practices started with Prophet Muhammad and several Sufi groups. D'Silva points out that contemporary issues of Muslim permissibility to study and practice yoga arise with modern conceptions and categorizations that validate religious status rather than what is found in the textual evidence of medieval primary literature authored by Muslims in light of their long association with India. In a fascinating chapter, "Sikhi(sm) Yoga and Meditation", Balbinder Singh Bhogal walks a tangential path by highlighting that the *Gur-Sikh* enlightenment "resulted in an epistemic shift from the personal and dualistic to the non-dual and collective..." (227) while emphasizing that the "...Sikh *jog* is simultaneously a critique of all forms of yoga while affirming a transformed understanding of it" (227). Bhogal narrates the splitting of *raaj-jog* practice through two major events in colonial history: the subjugation of Maharaja Ranjit Singh by the British in 1849 and the Partition of India in 1947. From here, Bhogal switches focus into the Euro-American frames of "commodification, consumption, technique-isation, orientalism and individualism" (234) while preserving the "deconstructive critique at the heart of the Guru Granth Sahib as an antithesis of modern consumerism" (235). Michael Stoeber and Jaegil Lee outline the evolution of contemplation in Christianity in dialogue with both Christian sources as well as some Asian religious traditions. The authors point out issues regarding appropriation and reading/comprehending yoga and meditative practices in religious isolation. Masoumeh Rahmani critiques operationalizing of strategies for the secular and scientific reframing of mindfulness-based meditation practices at the institutional and leadership levels bringing in the need for ethics studies.

Part IV focuses on perspectives from regional cultures in yoga and meditation for the first time for English-language audiences. This is a critical step towards decentering the Euro-American analytical modes. Andrea Acri writes about the "Yoga and Meditation Traditions in Insular Southeast Asia" arguing for studying these as "phenomena involving an active Southeast Asian agency" (273). Naomi Worth writes about contemplative techniques involving body, speech, and mind as encompassed by the term *Naljor* and its connections to Tibetan Buddhist tantra in the chapter "Yoga in Tibet." Worth writes specifically about "Niguma, a female practitioner who was important in the transmission and preservation of texts across generations as well as male access to them" (299). This is noteworthy as the only chapter that focuses on a female practitioner's key role in a historical context. Hidehiko Kurita draws on the concept of politics outlined by Foucault and Schmitt to delineate the development and transformations between authority, sovereignty, ideology, and religion and the effects of westernization in capturing the complex entwined history of meditation and politics in Japan. Kwangsoo Park and Younggil Park write extensively about the academic study of yoga in Korea with emphasis on the traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. Adrian Muñoz draws on Hauser's

(2013) work that yoga is a perfect example of transnational flow of ideas about spirituality, health, and well-being and gives an overview in Latin America. The influence of regional innovations on these systems point to possible pathways in a historical transmissional context as well. Suzanne Newcombe and Philippe Deslippe explore the role of English in expanding and limiting the transmission of yoga practice. While the chapter primarily outlines yoga transmission in English speaking cultures, it might be interesting to survey if yoga transmission in Japan, Korea, and Latin America also occur primarily in English, which may reveal how non-Anglophonic cultures navigate linguistic binaries arising from the use of English with its Cartesian duality framings. It may also provide insights into capturing the ethical values that are part of the cultural envisioning of yoga and meditation typically lost in Western capitalistic frameworks. Sravana Borkatky-Varma tackles the conception of the yogic body, particularly the complexity in the practice and transmission of the *kuṇḍalinī* tradition and associated practices in “The yogic body in global transmission” (366). The study of Hindu traditions through folk and other alternate lenses provides a rich multiplicity of oeuvres to the commercialized and branded forms of yoga as well as underscores the plurality of philosophical worldviews.

Part V addresses single, multi- and integrated interdisciplinary insights to the study of yoga and meditation. Charles Li in “Philology and Digital Humanities” labors over temporal, geographical, and cultural contexts in which variation in texts may arise, represent philosophical trends, and acquire independent lives. Daniela Bevilacqua demonstrates the validity and importance of ethnographic studies while Mikel Burley points to the growing demand to understanding philosophical considerations. Gudrun Bühnemann critically examines notions of mandala as transcendent art and the artist as a mystic. Laura Schmalzl, Pamela Jeter, and Sat Bir Singh Khalsa review the wide range of clinical yoga research studies through the presentation of multi-component analyses. Asaf Federman outlines attention control, meta-cognition, and approach as central to the study of meditation in cognitive science. Karen-Anne Wong argues that critical theory has the potential to create discourses centering yoga as inclusive and empowering. Matylda Ciołkosz proposes using phenomenology as a research method to systematically survey the experience of movement in and of the practicing yogic body and its transmission across environments and cultures (494). Finnian M. M. Gerety in “Sound and Yoga” ushers in sonic studies for a deeper analysis of yoga practice by marking the role of intentional and cultivated sounds through a survey of texts in Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, and Islamic traditions practitioners and recent contexts.

Overall, this is a balanced and welcome addition to the field. It is clear, useful, interesting, and offers a wide range of cultural perspectives including marginal ones. Multiple cultural perspectives enrich philosophies, religious cosmologies, ethical frameworks spiritual leanings, beliefs and health benefits that are linked to yoga and its practice across the world. This may in turn enliven current philosophical debates on how best to interpret ontological and epistemological viewpoints of yoga and meditation traditions in the classical textual sources without creating interpretation silos through only the lens of Western philosophy. It may also illuminate the connection of yoga and meditation practices to ethics. The discussion into mind and body and concomitant knowledge beyond Cartesian frames using research from different parts of the world is a timely intervention to academic scholarship. The curation enables readers to draw their own conclusions about the power structures and the legacies of systemic slavery and discrimination that inhabit yoga and meditation studies while centering the need to maintain constant critical inquiry and reflection. The book also examines legacies of privilege and issues of appropriation providing a very useful tool for teaching and rigorous future scholarship.

References

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Sandhiya Kalyanasundaram (she/her) is a dance educator, choreographer, and poet. Trained in Bharatanatyam, Butoh and Flamenco, Sandhiya has led and performed in several collaborative performances between dance styles, served on the Jury Panel for the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival, and used dance therapy to work with survivors of domestic violence. She is a yoga practitioner whose practice is intertwined with dance. She approaches yoga philosophically through the lens of classical Indian epistemological and ontological viewpoints. In practice, she explores how the somatic self converges, interfaces, and emerges in alignment with the natural environment. Sandhiya enjoys working at the intersection of science, technology, and art. Her current research and teaching interests lie at the intersection of cinema, performance, and philosophy, with a specific focus on environmental humanities. Her works have been published in the *International Journal of Screendance, Art and Perception*, and *Nature, Indian Literature Journal, The Trumpeter, Scholar and Feminist Online, Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, and *LeNS Network on Sustainability*.