

**Hindu, Buddhist and Daoist**  
**Meditation**  
**Cultural Histories**

**Edited by**  
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Oslo, 15 December, 2013  
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# Hindu, Buddhist and Daoist Meditation

The big waves of global meditation interest in the past half-century have all focused on techniques stemming from Hinduism, Buddhism and Daoism.

Hindu uses of sound developed into TM, Ananda Marga and the more strictly secular Relaxation Response, Clinical Standardized Meditation and Acem Meditation. They also inspired Christian practices like Maranatha Meditation and Centering Prayer.

Buddhist practices directing attention towards breath or body have become popular under names like Zen, Vipassana and Mindfulness, including clinical applications like Mindfulness-based stress reduction and Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy.

Daoist body practices such as Tàijí (Tai Chi) and Qìgōng (Chi kung) have reached global popularity, along with the Hindu-based body practices of Yoga. Combining stillness and movement, they are sometimes classified as meditation, sometimes as exercise.

This collection of essays on Hindu, Buddhist and Daoist practices is less concerned with modern waves of meditation interest than with selected topics from the larger traditions underlying them. Hindu meditation goes far beyond the repetition of sounds, Buddhist meditation is not restricted to breath and body, and Daoist meditation does not always include movement or the manipulation of bodily energies.

The rich and diverse traditions from which the modern practices have grown include techniques and states of mind that are seldom heard of in the modern context, terminology catching long forgotten nuances in meditative practice and experience, larger visions of the role of meditation within religious, spiritual and even political settings, as well as the extensive ritual and material culture often surrounding meditation.

The traditional grounding of these practices does not mean that they all belong to the past. The “creative contemplation” described by Bäumer is part of a system taught by the 20th-century Indian

teacher Lakshman Joo. The *vipassanā* practices described by Houtman have had important political ramifications in Burma since the late 19th century, and they are still referred to and practised by Aung San Suu Kyi and her followers. Furthermore, while the meditations on rotting bodies described by Dessein may not be the first choice of most modern meditators, the then recently dead body of Buddhist scholar Maurice Walshe was displayed for several weeks in England in 1998, apparently to serve as an object of meditation and contemplation.<sup>1</sup>

This book covers several aspects of Hindu, Buddhist and Daoist meditation. Eifring and Holen discuss some general elements of meditation, focusing on the various uses of attention in both traditional and modern practices across the Eurasian continent. Bronkhorst challenges the belief that a cultural history of meditation is even possible, largely drawing on his research in Buddhist and Jain sources. Braarvig presents us with an abundance of meditation terms from early Yoga and Buddhist sources, showing how the same words may appear in both traditions, but often with different meanings and connotations. Bäumer explores how Kashmir Shaivism uses one of these terms, *bhāvanā*, in a specialized meaning referring to the active contemplation and creation of meditative states. Anālayo explores in detail the Buddhist notion of the first absorption (*dhyāna*), including the seclusion from sensual pleasures and unwholesome qualities, the use of directed awareness and contemplation, as well as the sense of happiness that comes with meditative absorption. Houtman combines a micro and a macro view of *vipassanā* meditation, as it features both in the life of one Burmese hermitess and in the larger political order of late 19th- to early 21st-century Burma. Dessein discusses meditative practices involving visits to charnel grounds, seeing them as expressions of the intense concern with the end of life within both Buddhist and other traditions of meditation. Eskildsen asks a number of pertinent questions concerning the repeated appearance of specific meditative vision sequences in Daoist sources spanning one and a half millennia — how do these

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<sup>1</sup> Shaw 2006: 104.

visions come about, and why? Komjathy places Quánzhēn 全真 Daoist meditation within its larger cosmological setting, including notions of time that are manifested materially in the use of water-clocks (clepsydras) during communal meditation sessions.

The book makes no claim to comprehensiveness. For contrast and comparison, it may be profitably read along with a volume on *Meditation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), also edited by me. Another volume on Asian traditions of meditation and a volume discussing the relation between meditation and culture are under preparation.

Halvor Eifring