

tion for further work on *āpad*, dharma, and *āpadharma*—a necessary prelude to our collective efforts to understand ethics, law, religion, and normativity in ancient India.

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Sinister Yogis. By DAVID GORDON WHITE. Chicago: UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS, 2009. Pp. xxii + 352.

In his previous two books, *The Alchemical Body* and *Kiss of the Yoginī*, David Gordon White established himself as an Indological provocateur, one of the few scholars writing today who has both the language background and breadth of imagination to push the study of pre-modern Indian intellectual history into the post-modern age. White describes his latest book, *Sinister Yogis*, as the final installment of a trilogy, and it is both his most accessible and in some ways his most innovative book. He sets out to rescue the study of yoga from those scholars who view its entire history through the distorting lens of “classical Yoga,” the relatively recent Indological formulation that puts Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtras* at the center of the history of yoga and pushes earlier and later yogic developments to the margins. To correct this distortion, White directs our attention to the figure of the yogi, the practitioner of yoga. In doing this he de-centers the “philosophical” yoga texts that have been the primary concern of modern scholars and takes up to the many different genres of text that portray the yogi: epics and purānas; stories in Sanskrit, Persian, and Hindi that depict the extraordinary and sometimes villainous activities of yogis; accounts of yogis by travelers from outside of India; and so forth. Employing this method, White produces a history of yoga from its early origins to the modern period unlike any that has been written before.

The early twenty-first century is a watershed moment in the study of yoga, a time when many scholars from diverse backgrounds are seeking to re-assess the conventional understanding of yoga as enstasis, the withdrawal of the yogi into the self, suggested by Mircea Eliade’s enormously influential *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*. White fully acknowledges these other scholars, noting in particular that *Sinister Yogis* was inspired by James Fitzgerald, who has spent decades teasing out the meaning of yoga in the *Mokṣadharmā Parvan* of the *Mahābhārata*. The historical scope of White’s book is vast. He argues against the likelihood of the so-called Paśupati seal discovered at the archaeological site of Mohenjo-Daro being a depiction of the god Śiva sitting in lotus position. He includes a discussion of Swami Vivekananda’s influential re-definition of the term *rāja* (royal) yoga in the late nineteenth century. (But, perhaps wisely, he avoids the innovations of twentieth-century yoga, whose complex history has recently been explored in books by Elizabeth De Michelis, Joseph Alter, and Mark Singleton.) As in most works of such scope, White also makes some factual mistakes. For instance, he is in error on the accepted dates of the Vedānta commentator Bhāskara (eighth to ninth c., not mid-seventh c. as stated). In another surprising oversight, he misstates the place of Viṣṇu and Brahmā in the puranic triad (*trimūrti*) of gods, describing Viṣṇu’s role as the creator and Brahmā’s as the preserver (pp. 188–89, cf. *Kūrma Purāna* 2.4.21–23).

Inevitably, the historian of yoga must confront the meaning of the word yoga itself. On one end of the spectrum are authors who arbitrarily insist that yoga should only refer to the philosophical system of Patañjali and his commentators, and that any other meaning of yoga is imprecise. At the other extreme are those who see yoga everywhere in South Asian history, for instance attempting to include the entire history of bhakti and all the schools of Indian philosophy in their accounts, simply because the *Bhagavad Gītā* refers to the path of devotion as *bhakti yoga* and the path of philosophical speculation as *jñāna yoga*. Despite White’s insistence that he is concerned with yogis and not with yoga, he addresses this methodological problem by appealing to the etymology of the term yoga:

Surveying the history of both Indian and Western interpretations of yoga, one is struck by the absence of reflection on the cognitive dissonance that appears to be operative when the primary sense of the term yoga itself—which means “union,” “joining,” “junction”—is interpreted to mean its opposite, *viyoga*, which means “separation,” “disunion,” “disjunction.” (p. 38)

Hence there are two poles of meaning of the term yoga, an earlier primary meaning and a later meaning favored by commentators from the traditions of Pātañjala and Jaina yoga. Stuart Sarbacker, in his book *Samādhi: The Numinous and the Cessative in Indo-Tibetan Yoga*, sees these two meanings, the first labeled “numinous,” the second “cessative,” operating dialectically even in the *Yoga Sūtras*. Although Patañjali’s widely repeated definition of yoga at *YS* 1.2 features the idea of disjunction (or *nirodha*, cessation), his widely overlooked third section dealing with supernormal powers (*vibhūti*s) portrays numinous engagement with other beings in the world as part of the yogic path. White moves to correct the imbalance in modern scholarship by clearly showing that for the majority of texts in pre-modern India, both before and after Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtras*, the idea of union or yoking was the accepted meaning of the word yoga.

More problematic than a few factual mistakes is the title of White’s book, *Sinister Yogis*. As a reader I began with the expectation that White’s focus would be on those yogis who are “sinister” (in Latin, ‘left-hand’). Although his first and sixth chapters include many stories of dangerous, selfish, lowlife yogis, at its heart White’s book is not about these sorts of yogis. In fact, the yogis who appear in chapters two through five are on the whole quite upstanding. While the “numinous” engagement with beings in the world may involve transgression or criminality, it is not inherently sinister. White notes this discrepancy (and implicitly admits that his book’s title is misleading) when he adopts three terms from biology for evaluating yogic behavior:

Let it be noted here that . . . not all yogis of narrative have been “sinister” yogis . . . When one organism attaches itself to another for the benefit of both, as in the case of yogic initiation, that is the form of symbiosis known as *mutualism*. When the same occurs to the benefit of the “yoking” organism, but with no benefit or harm done to the “yoked” (i.e., the host)—as in the case of Śaṅkara’s takeover of the dead body of Amaruḥa—this is *commensalism*. When, however, the same occurs to the sole benefit of the “yoking” organism, and at the expense (if not the death) of the host, this is *parasitism*. (p. 47)

By naming his book *Sinister Yogis*, White is in danger of implying that all types of numinous yoga are selfish or egocentric. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. The majority of texts portraying the yogic path present supernormal powers (*vibhūti*s) as a part of that path, but insist that the use of such powers for ego gratification at the expense of others is counterproductive. As in the case of Mahāyāna Buddhist bodhisattvas who choose a continuing engagement with the world to help other beings, yoga texts understand that the *siddha*’s supernormal powers can be used for good, not just for ill. Although popular stories of sinister yogis were used to titillate the reading public in medieval and modern India, White’s focus on these stories sometimes obscures what is really paradigm-shaking about his book: the fact that yogic engagement and “yoking” with other beings is not in itself sinister at all, and actually has been part of mainstream discourses about yoga throughout history.

Sinister Yogis is at its best when it collapses distinctions between high and low, between “philosophical” and “popular” yogas. In particular, White’s fourth chapter is a tour de force in bringing together rarified Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika theories of perception with tantric texts describing the practical science of entering other beings’ bodies. As White notes, several important Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophical commentators also appear to have been Pāśupata yogis. There is a philosophical basis for practices of bodily possession—a “projective model” of perception that understands the act of seeing as involving rays shooting out from the eyes to come into contact with the object of perception (p. 125). After these rays make contact with the sensory object, the internal organ assumes the shape of that object. In this way, our mental apparatus is constantly undergoing transformation through its engagement with other objects in the world. This theory of perception was widely accepted in pre-modern India. Given its assumptions about the permeability of minds and bodies, there is nothing surprising about philosophers’ matter-of-fact acceptance of yogis’ abilities to inhabit the bodies of other beings. Although most famously and colorfully described in the texts of tantric yogis, such practices are widely described elsewhere, such as in Vedānta commentaries on *Brahma Sūtra* 4.4.15. In tantric contexts this power

is understood as underpinning the relationship between guru and disciple. As the twentieth-century scholar-practitioner Gopinath Kaviraj explains, it is the teacher's ability to inhabit the bodies of his disciples that allows them to progress on the path of yoga: "The more people's bodies a yogi is able to make his own by entering into foreign bodies, the greater the number [of bodies] will be pervaded by his mind, and the more he will be able to use his own action-energy (*kriyā-śakti*) for the general welfare, in his all-pervasive form" (p. 166).

David Gordon White's *Sinister Yogis* is brilliant, digressive, non-linear, and likely to be criticized by readers who find fault with specific interpretive and translational choices that he makes. Writing a book such as this one takes courage. It is safest in the modern academy to burrow into the minutiae of a single era or philosophical school and to write only for a small group of initiates. *Sinister Yogis* is the most comprehensive work to date in a movement that is fundamentally re-shaping our understanding of what yoga is. This book is full of bold claims, and I believe it will be debated by future scholars, much as Mircea Eliade's *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* was by previous generations.

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The Culture of the Book in Tibet. By KURTIS R. SCHAEFFER. New York: COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2009. Pp. xiii + 244.

Every scholar of Tibetan Studies is aware of the immense importance the book holds in the Tibetan cultural world. There has been, however, up to now not a single monograph that deals exclusively with the Tibetan book and its different aspects, be they material and economic, social, cultural, or political. The monograph under review promises to close this knowledge gap. By drawing on more than one hundred fifty Tibetan sources of diverse literary genre, from the historical chronicle to autobiographical accounts and reference lists to the Buddhist canons, Kurtis Schaeffer concentrates on the book in Tibetan cultural regions, spanning a period of more than six hundred years. His study of the "culture of the book" aims to bring together the area of the "book" with that of "culture," thus exploring Tibetan culture in a single material, and at the same time highly symbolic, object, the book. In the author's own words, "the study of the culture of the book in Tibet is the study of discourse about books in the region's history, that discourse's attendant practices, and the communities and institutions formed by that discourse and in which it is debated and contested" (p. 17).

The monograph developed out of separate essays, and this origin is sometimes still noticeable in the book, but mostly not to its disadvantage. The book is divided into six chapters that explore different facets of the culture of the book in Tibet. It ends with an epilogue that brings all the different strands together in a Tibetan tale, a rather unorthodox way of building a synthesis.

The first chapter concentrates on the book in its material aspects. It talks about the "facts" of book-making in Tibet, about paper and ink, block carving, printing houses, and copying businesses. This is a rather unexplored area in Tibetan Studies, as little research has been done about book-making in the Tibetan world. The material aspects provoke the author to pose further questions that directly lead to important aspects of Tibetan cultural life in the pre-modern era, like the relation between orality and textuality, a topic the author repeatedly addresses.

In the next chapter Schaeffer explores the editing and printing processes of Tibetan books, drawing attention to the actors involved, from the scribes and woodblock cutters to the officials in charge of the printing process. The exploration of the Tibetan canon, which Schaeffer rightly characterizes as an "open and constantly changing canon" (p. 12), starts with Bu-ston, the great fourteenth-century scholar who was the driving force behind the *Kanjur* compilation. Schaeffer for once does not concentrate on the intellectual achievements of this great intellectual, but on the practical details of producing such a vast number of texts, on scribal practice and the treatment of the workers, matters which are detailed