ANGLOPHONE YOGA AND MEDITATION OUTSIDE OF INDIA

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Introduction

‘Modern Yoga’, as defined by Elizabeth De Michelis (2004) and assumed in most academic works on yoga, has been influenced by the English-speaking world and the medium of English (e.g. Hackett 2017; Jain 2015, 2020; Newcombe 2009, 2019). It is true that many of those who popularised yoga as Indian physical culture and a tool of nationalism in the early twentieth century did not speak English – and this is an under-researched area of yoga studies (Newcombe 2017; Alter 2004). But many Indian teachers did speak English, especially those who gained an international following. English was influential to the extent that when Mark Singleton decided to trace the construction of ‘modern yoga’, he also specified his object of study as ‘transnational anglophone yoga’ (Singleton 2010: 10).

English was the language of the British Empire and became the common second language for many within India, which has hundreds of indigenous languages. In this role, English within India has continued to be influential after independence. English has had specific influence on the transmission of various religious and spiritual ideas both within and from India to the world; Srinivas Aravamudan (2005) identified ‘Guru English’ as a register of English that was used to transmit Indian spiritual wisdom to the wider world from the Romantic Orientalism of the late-eighteenth century to the more recent spirituality of New Age and global commercialisation.

English has become a global language with a reach that extends beyond the imperial and political influences exerted by Britain and the United States from the nineteenth to twenty-first centuries. In 2019, English was the most spoken language in the world (taking into account its use as a second or third language) (Ethnologue 2019). As Aravamudan points out, ‘English dominates by virtue of its stranglehold on global organisations as an international auxiliary or link language’, such as the strong links English has to international exchanges with ‘computers, medicine, business, media, higher education, and communications’ (2005: 1–2). To some extent these domains are largely features of the lives of a globalised elite – those working in these sectors tend to have more disposable income, higher education levels and greater access to travel than other workers. This demographic also holds true with the majority of global yoga practitioners outside of India.

Originally the language of empire (both British and US), King has argued that English was also the medium through which the modern binary assumptions of mind/body and science/
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religion have come to dominate global articulations about the nature of meditation and yoga (King 2019: 5). Yet English has been more than the cosmopolitan language of power and the coloniser (Pollock 2002). The ‘colonised’ also extensively use the language to ‘talk back’ and articulate their experiences (Rushdie 1982; Said 1978; Spivak 1988). In the context of globalised modern yoga, these roles are complex and often mixed, since individuals promoting yoga wish to maximise the spread of their message while depicting yoga as a means of resisting some aspects of the dominant Anglo-European cultures. The complexities of global cultural and information exchange in the twentieth century is only beginning to be analysed, even as technology transforms our global communications networks in ways we are just starting to comprehend.

What exactly yoga is in this context – what practices and ideas are transmitted – has both transnational ‘universalised’ and localised elements (Newcombe 2018; Pollock 2002). In trying to define yoga and meditation within the specific location of the medium of English, we hope to highlight some broad themes in the various local creative expressions of yoga (many of which also use the medium of English). It is intended that this may contribute to the ‘consensual dis-sensus’ of what yoga and meditation is and has been, which has the potential to contribute to the articulation of new kinds of cosmopolitanisms – acknowledging and validating both the universal and particular simultaneously in modern and contemporary formulations of yoga (Breckenridge et al. 2002).

Early modern and nineteenth-century networks and translations

Europeans (re)discovered India, and to some extent yoga, during the European ‘Age of Discovery’ which covers the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. Although there were overland trade routes in antiquity, and limited trade continued by land in the early years of this millennium, advances in sea travel and trade ambitions during this period made India an attractive place to source valuable imports. While most European travellers were primarily focused on establishing beneficial trade relationships, missionaries also accompanied these exploratory ships. Both types of traveller sometimes published travelogues of ‘exotic’ cultures. The behaviours of ascetics, associated with ‘yoga’ and meditation practices, can be found in attempts to catalogue the unfamiliar beliefs and practices of the ‘pagan natives’ and to justify missionary activity. In northern India, would-be British colonial powers felt it necessary to disrupt the militarised Nāth (Hindu ascetic) orders who had developed allegiances with local rulers. During most of the colonial period, living yoga and yogis were largely regarded with contempt and suspicion (Pinch 2006; White 2009).

Even while living Indian ‘yogis’ were being denigrated by British propaganda and policies, Sanskrit literature was being explored and acclaimed. Colonial bureaucrats hoped to find a better basis for government; idealists and historians hoped to find the origins of European languages and religions in Sanskrit. The founding of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784 by the British polymath and judge Sir William Jones (1746–1794) established a formal study of India’s languages and cultures (Banerji 2016: 555–556; see also Rocher 2002). In this context, yoga became closely associated with the explanations given by Kṛṣṇa in the Bhāgavat Gītā, which began to appear in translation in European languages in the early 1800s (Marshall 2002[1970]). Largely through translations of the Bhāgavat Gītā, interest in yoga became acceptable for the upper classes of society interested in cultural and mystical exploration and the frontiers of human knowledge. The Gītā has perhaps been the most frequently read text by those involved in the yoga revival, not least due to Mahatma Gandhi citing it as an inspirational text, having encountered it first as a law student in London during the 1880s (Newcombe 2020).
Buddhism, in turn, was also explored initially through texts, and the Pali Canon in particular. The 1880 publication of Edwin Arnold’s *The Light of Asia*, a popular English verse account of the life of the Buddha, met with widespread popularity and critical acclaim among liberal elites. Victorians imagined Buddhism in ideal terms without reference to institutional power struggles or the needs and expectations of everyday people. The question of whether Buddhism was a religion or a philosophy was debated. However, for many, no system that professed atheism could be considered a religion (Almond 1988: 94). In the nineteenth century a philosophical Buddhism became articulated in European and American intellectual discussions as distinct from the ‘idol-worshipping Hindus’, and the foundations for secular ‘mindfulness’ movements were established (Tweed 2005). In 1881 the Pali Text Society was established in Britain by Professor Rhys Davids (1843–1922), who translated many volumes of the Buddha’s teaching into English, promoting Buddhism as a compelling model for daily living. Davids later founded the more public-facing Buddhist Society for Great Britain and Ireland in 1907 (Oliver 1979: 34 and 49).

The Theosophical Society

The Theosophical Society was founded in 1875 in the United States by the American Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907) and the Russian Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891). It quickly became a multinational and multilingual organisation dedicated to the exploration of esoteric religiosity that also reinterpreted and championed Indian religions and was an important element in defining the first international understandings of both yoga and meditation in anglophone contexts (see also Albanese 2007; Clarke 1997). English was central for its international communications, which continued through the relocation of its headquarters to Adyar just outside Madras (now Chennai) in India in 1879. The society’s dissemination of materials throughout the English-speaking world was extremely influential (Dixon 2001; Sand and Rudbog 2020; Godwin 1994; Lubelsky 2012). However over time, different cultures and linguistic groups emphasised distinct aspects of the Theosophical interventions (see Acri, Chapter 19 and Muñoz, Chapter 23 in this volume).

Not only did the Theosophical Society produce texts, but its reading rooms and distribution houses provided a place for broad religious explorations; its speaking forums allowed specific Indian individuals to more easily promote their own teachings of yoga (Newcombe 2019: 9–11, 19). As De Michelis (2004) has argued, Vivekananda’s invitation for Americans and Europeans to identify with Indian yoga was made in a Theosophically saturated milieu. Early English translations of the *Yogasūtra*, which has become an important point of reference for many modern and contemporary yoga practitioners (Singleton 2008; White 2014), were produced in a relatively accessible format by the Theosophical Society. The Theosophical Society was also crucial in the initial global popularisation of Buddhism, and it translated and published Buddhist texts and made them available in public reading rooms wherever ‘lodges’ were established. This interest inspired some British people to take ordination as Buddhist monks and nuns in the early twentieth century.

Early twentieth-century publications

The turn of the century saw the publication of several key yogic texts in English along with the emergence of print networks of publishers and retailers. These connections spread yogic texts and ideas throughout the anglophone world and beyond. In addition to the books of
Vivekananda (De Michelis 2004), two of the most important figures in the Indian yoga revival of the early twentieth century merged yoga practice with physical culture and medical science to shape what is recognised as yoga today. Shri Yogendra (Manibhai Desai, 1897–1989) and Swami Kuvalayananda (Jagannatha Ganesha Gune, 1883–1966) published extensively in English, including their respective journals Yoga and Yoga-Mīmāṃsā. Many of these early successful popularisers of yoga had high standards of English education: Yogendra was educated in the medium of English at Amalsad English School and then St. Xavier’s College in Bombay, and Kuvalyananda, although coming from a poor family, excelled at school and mastered English. Swami Vivekananda attended the Presidency University in Bengal which taught in English. Sri Aurobindo was privately educated in England and attended Cambridge University. All of these early pioneers were well placed to ‘talk back’ to the British Empire in its own language by encouraging a universalisation of yoga as an ideal practice.

There is evidence that the earliest forms of postural practice in the United States arrived through printed materials rather than lived traditions. Vivekananda taught some postures in his small, private classes in New York during the late-nineteenth century (Goldberg 2016: 54–55). Yet it appears these courses were designed by Vivekananda based on texts sent to him (Deslippe 2018: 34). During the 1920s, Rishi Singh Gherwal transposed material from the pages of Yoga-Mīmāṃsā into his pamphlet Practical Hatha Yoga for distribution in the United States (Deslippe 2018: 33–34 and 7n1). Based in the United States from the 1920s, Paramahansa Yogananda (1893–1952) also pioneered a form of yoga teaching which involved physical postures, drawing from physical culture as well as other contemporary literature (Singleton 2010: 132).

An important example of the power and diffusion of print is the works of William Walker Atkinson (1862–1932), a Baltimore-born attorney who wrote under the pseudonym of Yogi Ramacharaka from 1903 to 1912. His yogic writings combined New Thought, Theosophy and physical culture, and were first published in the United States as a series of mail-order lessons and then books by the Yogi Publication Society of Chicago. These ‘yoga’ teachings were republished through a special distribution arrangement in London by L. N. Fowler & Co. and became available through booksellers in major South Asian cities such as Allahabad, Delhi, Lahore and Mumbai, as well as through the Latent Light Culture of Tinnevelly. They were also sold in Australia and New Zealand no later than 1911; in the 1930s several of the South Asian yoga teachers in the United States presented the Yogi Ramacharaka exercises to US audiences as ancient Indian yogic practices. Through the transnational global networks of English-language print material, the US-born Atkinson, who never travelled to India, wound up influencing Indian understandings of yoga and beyond (Deslippe 2019). Even if Ramacharaka’s teachings have little (if any) historical continuity with Indian forms of yoga, his ideas and practices have become central to the framing of many modern yoga traditions in both cosmopolitan contexts and Indian ones (e.g. Bharati 1970). The Ramacharaka books were quickly translated into other languages and provide an example of how exchanges within the anglophone world often went global (Deslippe 2019). Like Theosophy, Ramacharaka had a global and multilingual spread, but the distinct presentation of ‘yoga’ arrived out of an anglophone context.

Another incredibly important influence is that of Swami Sivananda (Kuppuswami Iyer 1887–1963). Before turning to yoga, Sivananda trained as a ‘western’ biomedical doctor and ran an English-language medical journal in Tamil Nadu called The Ambrosia, demonstrating a good command of English language and culture. While studying classical yoga texts for his PhD with the philosopher Dasgupta in Kolkata during the 1930s, the Romanian scholar Mircea Eliade (1907–1986) heard of an ‘English-speaking swami in Rishikesh’ with an authentic yoga practice
and travelled to learn from him. English was a second language for both Sivananda and Eliade, but it facilitated a communication between the two men.

Moreover, Sivananda was a prolific writer (of easily posted pamphlets and books) and corresponded in English. Strauss argues that Sivananda’s ‘cosmopolitanism, fluency in English and congenial attitude brought him wide recognition’ (Strauss 2005: 40). She goes on to argue that Sivananda’s communications in English, like the literature produced by Vivekananda before him, created a global ‘imagined community’ of yoga practitioners in Benedict Anderson’s (1983) sense – a ‘community of people who, though they are rarely acquainted in the face-to-face sense, nevertheless feel themselves connected through their shared interest in and practice of yoga’ (2005: 40–1).

The English-language publications sent out worldwide from Sivananda’s Divine Light Society (founded in 1935) had a vital role to play in the creation of a globalised modern yoga.²

Anglophone physical culture and yoga

One of the major forces to shape modern yoga was the modernist physical culture movement that promoted physical health and strength training through military drills, competitive games, calisthenics and gymnastics. Physical culture was influential throughout Europe (particularly in Prussia and later Germany) and the anglophone world. Singleton (2010) has argued that the global popularity of these exercises for health likely influenced the development of posture-oriented yoga in the modern period, while in the later twentieth century doing and teaching yoga became socially acceptable for women partially due to precedents within movement traditions for women in Europe and the United States (e.g. Newcombe 2007). While physical culture and yoga have resonances in many different cultural–linguistic contexts, the medium of English was particularly helpful in the transfer of ideas. Social Darwinism and eugenics became intertwined with calls for nationalism, while military readiness and physical culture was seen as a remedy to these concerns (Singleton 2007).

Although originating in imperial urban metropolises, these concepts were also integrated into independence movements, particularly in India. Indian nationalists promoted a distinctly Indian physical culture for ‘Indian bodies’ and in the Indian akhāṭa (gymnasium). In this context, yoga āsana was added to a repertoire of Indian ‘physical culture’ that included indigenous martial arts, wrestling warm-up exercises (dands), sūrya namaskāra, Indian club exercises and mallaṇkhamba, i.e. exercises on a pillar or ropes (Alter 2004; McCartney 2019a; Mujumadāra 1950; Singleton 2010). The connections between the yoga revival and physical culture show just how dynamic and numerous exchanges were within the anglophone world. Yogendra was not only influenced by physical culture (and titled one of his earlier books Yoga Physical Education), but also spent a half-decade in the United States where he worked with several US health reformers. Kuvalayananda hosted a professor of physical education from Columbia University at his centre in India, in addition to physicians and academics (Alter 2004: 73–108; Goldberg 2016: 80–87.)

Courses on ‘yoga’ and the development of psychic control could be found in the advertisement sections of physical culture journals that circulated from the interwar period into the 1950s and became part of mainstream exercise culture. Physical culture magazines in the United States during the late 1930s noticeably heralded the arrival of postural forms of yoga as a new import (Deslippe 2018: 7). In Britain, Mary Bagot Stack’s Women’s League of Health and Beauty, which was very popular among middle-class women from the 1930s through the 1950s, directly incorporated some yoga asanas, which the founder reported learning while living in India with her husband in 1912 (Newcombe 2007; Singleton 2010: 150–2). This emphasis on yoga asana as part of physical culture increasingly came to define yoga as asana-focused in the second half of the twentieth century.
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Immigration, English and empire

A significant number of Indian guru figures travelled during the early years of the twentieth century, making influential visits to both the United States and Britain (and often other anglophone countries such as Canada). They included Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) and Swami Abhedananda (1866–1939) of the Vedanta Society, Swami Rama Tirtha (1873–1906), Swami Prabhavananda (1893–1976), Yogananda (1893–1952), Yogendra Mastanami (1897–1989), Premananda Baba Bharati (1857–1914) and the more obscure Tiger Mahatma (dates unknown). In the early twentieth century, Britain was visited by Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986—who lived most of his life in California, visiting Europe regularly), Ananda Acharya (1881–1945), Hari Prasad Shastri (1882–1956), Meher Baba (1894–1969) and Swami Avyaktananda (dates unknown), originally representing the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre (Beckerlegge 2020). Some of these figures visited only briefly, but their teachings were likely incorporated into others’ English-language presentations of yoga and meditation. There was a particular ease of travel between member states of the British Commonwealth, including India; before 1962 there were no restrictions on empire citizens (e.g. Indians) resettling in Britain, provided they had the funds to get there.

Several observers in both India and the United States noted that English served as a ‘critical dividing line’ in the arrival of yoga to the United States at the turn of the century, and that the swamis and yogis who came from India to America had a common proficiency in the language and a background of English-style education (Deslippe 2018: 21). Ironically, it was a restriction of movement that saw a major increase in the dissemination of yoga in the United States during the interwar decades of the 1920s and 1930s. Legal decisions rendered South Asians as ‘ineligible for citizenship’, and a wave of denaturalisation proceedings that left many without any citizenship at all led several dozen South Asians in the United States who were unable to leave the country or otherwise establish themselves to take up the profession of travelling yoga teacher and metaphysical lecturer. They would move from city to city, often in a regular, circuit-like pattern, and offer the public a series of free lectures that led into private lessons and dyadic services for a fee (Deslippe 2018). In the early years of the twentieth century, outside of general ideas of being mental and magical, there was no singular or stable idea as to what ‘yoga’ was, and these peripatetic instructors would freely borrow and modify ideas and practices from New Thought, Spiritualism and occultism and present it to US audiences as ancient yogic wisdom from India.

The global elite of empire and the ease of global travel for English-speaking people into global contexts can be illustrated by several unusual individuals. The life story of the Latvian-born, multilingual Indra Devi (born Eiženija Pētersone, 1899–2002) highlights how global these flows of ideas and people could be: Devi was born in the capital of Latvia, Riga, and trained as an actress in Russia before deciding to travel to India, having been inspired by the writings of Yogi Ramacharaka and a Theosophically led camp of the Order of the Eastern Star in The Netherlands, which presented the young Jiddu Krishnamurti as a world teacher in 1926 (Goldberg 2015: 65–67). Devi eventually travelled to India, where she learned yoga from Krishnamacharya, Kuvalayananda and likely from Sivananda, as well as later in life being strongly influenced by Sathya Sai Baba and Swami Premananda (Goldberg 2015: 239–243). Devi made a career of teaching yoga. She influenced understandings of yoga among expatriates in Singapore, then the Hollywood elite in the 1950s, and in later life settled and taught in Argentina. Although Devi was an accomplished linguist (and actor) herself, in many of these global contexts English was very often the primary means of communication to individuals of a range of nationalities. Her broad influences highlight the variety of teachings and understandings associated with yoga.
Adult education and mass media

As yoga and meditation continued to grow in size and reach, they largely expanded through pre-existing networks in the anglophone world – and texts published in English were no exception, both in quantity and in influence. Two complementary and sequential bibliographies identified an exponentially growing number of works on yoga published in English between 1950 and 2005: more than 4,000 books, journal and magazine articles, instruction manuals, translations, dissertations and theses, and periodicals were dedicated to the topic (Jarrell 1981; Callahan 2007, see also Newcombe 2019: 10). Particularly influential was the *Autobiography of a Yogi*, published in 1946 and allegedly authored by Paramahamsa Yogananda, which helped to fix India as a mystic and miraculous land for western seekers for decades following its release (Williamson 2010: 56, 138). Similarly, *Light on Yoga* (1966), written by B. K. S. Iyengar (1918–2014) and first published in English in 1966, has often been described as ‘the bible of modern yoga’. It has sold millions of copies and was translated into at least seventeen other languages. It is notable that an Englishman who was deeply conversant with Buddhism, Theosophy and Alistair Crowley’s teachings, Gerald Yorke, had a significant role in shaping the (English) language used in the original publication and, in particular, the introduction to the volume (Newcombe 2019: 28–38).

In Britain, yoga became integrated into a network of publicly funded adult education classes during the 1960s and 1970s. In this context, yoga was (usually) expected to be secular, and to promote health and fitness as part of the vision of the social welfare state and post-war recovery. It was likely in this adult education context that the first yoga teaching certificates were issued in the late 1960s, as the directors of adult education centres wanted some measure of quality control over those teaching on taxpayers’ money (Newcombe 2014). Particularly influential in the adult education context was the creation by B. K. S. Iyengar of a standardised teaching system of asana that could be transmitted largely in the absence of a charismatic guru (Newcombe 2014).

B. K. S. Iyengar struggled with formal English to some extent, failing his school matriculation examination in English and not progressing to further formal education. However, English was also key to his first yoga teaching posts; in an autobiographical reflection, Iyengar describes being sent to Pune by his brother-in-law Krishnamacharya because he was one of the few students available to take up the appointment, which required instruction in English (Iyengar nd). While teaching in Pune, a practical, auto–didact English became Iyengar’s means of transmission and precise asana-focused instruction. One long-term student recalled that Iyengar described English as ‘the best language in which to teach yoga because you could always find an appropriate word when teaching pupils: not only was it a very technical language but its expressiveness was a powerful teaching tool’ (Ward 2019). The systematised and exacting articulations in the Iyengar method of teaching (Ciołkosz 2014) are likely to have facilitated and strongly influenced the spread and nature of anglophone presentations of yoga.

In the United States, popularisation was largely carried out through mass media, including paperback books and long-playing records. In second half of the twentieth century, the media with the longest reach for presenting yoga in the United States (and soon internationally) was television. The first yoga teacher in United States with a television programme was Richard Hittleman, whose *Yoga for Health* began airing in 1961 and was then broadcast nationally for decades. Hittleman’s style was imported into British television programming from 1971–1974, and Lynn Marshall continued to present yoga on television until 1983 (Newcombe 2019: 186–194). Lilias Folan, inspired by Hittleman, started her own show, *Yoga and You*, in 1970 and recorded 500 episodes that aired on public broadcasting stations across the United States for almost three decades.
Movement of gurus and the counter-culture

The counter-culture of the late-1960s was another significant moment in the development of yoga and meditation in the anglophone world and beyond. The combination of a period of geopolitical stability, inexpensive travel and the comparatively low cost of living in Asia allowed journeys to India via the overland ‘hippy trail’ through Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, allowing some ‘westerners’ to live in India for months at a time (Oliver 2014). Significantly, many yoga teachers and their students were able to successfully negotiate both sides of the era’s drug culture by promoting yoga and meditation as both the ultimate ‘high’ or ‘trip’ while simultaneously being part of a healthy, drug-free lifestyle. The engagement between the counter-culture and ‘eastern spirituality’ allowed yoga and meditation to spread through the networks and varied milieus of the hippies and to grow through metropolitan centres, university campuses and ‘college towns’, health food stores and communes. This was not an exclusively English-language phenomenon, but the ubiquity of English-language pop culture and particularly the popularity of musicians who were closely associated with ‘eastern spirituality’ during this period did much to spread ideas about yoga and meditation globally (Goldberg 2010).

The United States passed sweeping changes to its immigration laws in 1965 that ended four decades of exclusionary policies and allowed immigrants from Asia to arrive in significant numbers. While this is often seen as a turning point in the reception of yoga and meditation, the connection between the two is more a matter of conventional wisdom. There were other factors preceding and beyond immigration policy that generated interest in these practices and shaped them for wider consumption, and many of the figures that are associated with the ‘turn East’ – including Swami Prabhupada of the Hare Krishnas and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi of Transcendental Meditation – arrived before the 1965 Immigration Act.

While the counter-culture of the 1960s marked a distinct period in the popularisation of a variety of ‘eastern’ religions and spiritualities in the global context, its influence has often been overestimated. The ‘hippy trail’, alternative religions and mind-altering practices were explored by occultists in the early twentieth century and the Beats in the 1950s (Baker 2008; Pearlman 2012). The events of the late 1960s – such as the appearance of Swami Satchidananda at Woodstock in 1969 – marked a ‘widening of the road’ rather than the paving of new ground (Newcombe 2019: 142). Likewise, the shifting foci towards consumerism and individualism at the end of the twentieth century did not mark the end of counter-cultural communities, camps and festivals that use yoga and meditation as integral parts of their identity (e.g. Lucia 2020; Wildcroft 2020).

The arrival of scientific meditation

Yoga and meditation became more acceptable after World War II, as teachers in South Asia, Europe and the United States presented it as physical, practical, scientific and accessible to westerners. In the United States, meditation and Buddhism were popularised in a way that was both later than and different to yoga (Mitchell 2016). In Europe, most of the direct immigration from Buddhist-majority countries happened after World War II. Early Buddhists in Britain were from Theravadin countries (Sri Lanka, Thailand and Burma), followed by Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean and Tibetan Buddhists (Baumann 2002). But as meditation techniques were ‘anglicised’ in the United States in the post-war period, they have had a strong influence on British and European ideas of ‘meditation’ and ‘mindfulness’. Since English was one of the primary languages of global publication in the biomedical sciences, this trend was accelerated, as was the influence in English-speaking areas and beyond.
There were a handful of Zen teachers from China and Japan on the west coast of North America in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But meditative techniques such as visualisation and contemplative ‘going into silence’ were mostly associated with New Thought and early forms of yoga in the United States. The Buddhist immigrant communities faced persecution and largely served as support groups for the community rather than teaching others about Buddhism (Matthews 2002; Seager 2002). The mass internment of more than 100,000 Japanese citizens on the west coast of the United States during World War II accelerated a process of Anglicisation and Americanisation of Japanese Buddhism in North America in the post-war period (Seager 2002: 106–109; McMahan 2002).

Using English, Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki (1870–1966) helped to popularise Zen Buddhism during the interwar decades with a series of published essays and then, after World War II, as a lecturer and a professor in the United States. During this time, Zen was further popularised by the writers of the counter-cultural Beat movement and Alan Watts. This nascent interest helped the Soto Zen monk Shunryu Suzuki to form the San Francisco Zen Center and the Tassajara Zen Mountain Center, incorporated and completed in 1962 and 1967 respectively (Seager 2002: 110–101; Chadwick 1999). In the late 1960s, Tibetan Buddhists fleeing the Chinese occupation of Tibet began to arrive in Europe and North America and offered tantalising and popular tastes of secret and exclusive teachings, believed to be untainted by modernity (Wallace 2002: 44–46).

In the 1960s, the promotion of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and his Transcendental Meditation as scientific was hugely influential in creating scientific interest in the biological effects of meditation, and later yoga. The 1975 book *The Relaxation Response* by Herbert Benson and Miriam Klipper presented Transcendental Meditation to the public in an accessible and scientifically supported form, and was cited in a 1986 survey reported in the *New York Times* as the most-recommended book by clinical psychologists to their patients (Harrington 2009; Hickey 2019).

The practice of mindfulness developed in Buddhist communities, but quickly expanded in the 1980s as teachers such as Jon Kabat-Zinn and Thich Nhat Hanh developed models for teaching meditation and published books that offered mindfulness as an accessible technique with practical benefits. By the 1990s mindfulness had established itself outside of a Buddhist context, and it became part of the mainstream self-help milieu as it was applied to everything from performance in sports, weight loss and workplace efficiency (Wilson 2014: 36–42).

Several students of South Asian teachers who came to the United States in the 1960s made inroads in rendering yoga and meditation as better known and more palatable to mainstream America in the 1980s and 1990s. Dean Ornish, a physician who studied with Satchidananda for several decades, became an influential advocate for reversing heart disease through changes in diet and lifestyle, including yoga and meditation. Another physician, the Indian-born Deepak Chopra, studied Transcendental Meditation and was initially associated with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and his organisations. While Chopra has frequently been the target of criticism and mockery, his book sales and high public profile have nonetheless made his ideas, and thus his techniques, well known – including yoga, meditation and ayurveda (Warrier 2019; Reddy 2004).

**Early 1980s to the present**

Yoga and meditation, like many of the practices and beliefs that were largely associated with the New Age movement of the 1970s and 1980s, underwent a rapid expansion in popularity and mainstream acceptance; by the turn of the millennium they were so common as to be often unremarkable (Deslippe 2015a). This was in no small part a product of the effort of
many schools of yoga and meditation who began to institute teacher-training programmes and continued to expand and promote themselves.

Yoga during this time was further popularised and influenced by the introduction of VHS tapes in the 1980s and then DVDs in the 1990s. Like the syndicated television shows that preceded them, VHS tapes and DVDs allowed for many people not only to practise yoga in the privacy of their own homes, but to do so at their convenience. Pre-recorded classes freed teachers from the limitations of a television studio and allowed them to create better-produced classes with specialised instruction for specific audiences. Later surveys would show that a large percentage of all yoga practitioners in the United States saw their practice as something that was not done in a studio, but at home in front of their television. Yoga also received a boost from the fitness ‘boom’ and rapid expansion of gyms and health clubs in the United States during the 1980s that allowed for wider reception of health and fitness and provided a common venue for yoga teachers as the popularity of yoga dramatically increased in the following decade (McKenzie 2013).

After the turn of the millennium, yoga and meditation in the United States, Britain and Australia found popularity and mainstream acceptance. All these areas showed similar practitioner demographics in ways that suggest strong similarities within the anglophone world (Ding and Stamatakis 2014; Birdee 2008; Penman et al. 2012; Yoga Journal and Yoga Alliance 2016). However, these demographic studies and surveys also show how complicated an understanding of these practices might be. The widely touted large number of anglophone yoga practitioners reached by these surveys might not represent a stable population engaging in a spiritual practice, but rather may mostly consist of a steady flow of people who take it up for physical fitness and wellbeing and then leave it for other forms after some time, to be replaced by others who take up yoga for the first time (Yoga Journal and Yoga Alliance 2016).

A prominent case that shows how much these practices have grown and gained mainstream acceptance is the death in 2011 of Apple co-founder Steve Jobs, after which several obituaries, posthumous tributes and biographies looking for the sources of his success and innovation pointed to his travels in India as a young man, his reading of Yogananda’s *Autobiography of a Yogi*, and the influence of Zen Buddhism on his aesthetic sense (Segall 2013; Issacson 2001). Such a glowing association with yoga and meditation would not only have been unthinkable for someone in such a position of power even a few decades earlier, it was actually used to discredit a sitting governor and potential vice-presidential candidate in the United States (Deslippe 2015b).

As the size and influence of yoga and meditation shows no sign of lessening in the anglophone world and beyond, there are serious and complicated issues involving how yoga and meditation are defined and represented. Critics of cultural appropriation have attacked what they see as the commercialised and ill-informed inclusion of Hindu elements into western yoga classes, while those who have taken up what Jain has called the ‘Hindu origins’ position (2014) have criticised those who do not fully and openly embrace yoga as Hindu. Debates on the teaching of yoga and meditation in American public schools have hinged on whether or not these practices should be understood as inherently religious. Promoters of yoga and meditation practices from the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi to the ‘Encinitas School District Yoga’ have presented these practices as nondenominational and secular. Meanwhile (mostly) Christian advocates have insisted on these practices having an integral spiritual nature with unavoidable effects on practitioners (Brown 2013; Newcombe 2018). These debates also have political consequences. In 2014, the Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi, made yoga a key part of India’s exercise of diplomatic soft power on the global stage, particularly with the creation of the International Day of Yoga in which he described – in English – the practice of yoga to the United Nations.
General Assembly in his first major international speech as Prime Minister as ‘an invaluable gift of India’s ancient tradition’ (Modi 2014).

However, there are also signs of the limitations of English as a language of transmission for yoga in contemporary India. The most popular television guru in India, Swami Ramdev, teaches almost entirely in Hindi and is closely associated with Hindutva nationalism (McCartney 2019b). B. K. S. Iyengar used English to popularise yoga throughout the world, collaborating with native English speakers in his published written work to ensure comprehension for his intended audience of initially British, then US, then global English–as-second-language audiences. In contrast, his son Prashant describes the English language as ‘inadequate for the teaching of Yog’ (using the Hindi term) (Ward 2019). Prashant’s use of English is more creative and postcolonial, playing with the limits of English and creating new words that sound foreign to many of the native and second-language English speakers from around the world who attend his teachings.

According to many critics, the assessment of mindfulness and other meditation techniques through scientific study caused these traditions to develop more in line with western capitalist and neoliberal values and become removed from their ethical roots (Lau 2000; King 2019; Carrette and King 2004). In the most extreme cases, the perceived ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ outcomes of meditation techniques, such as increased productivity and engagement with one’s work and detachment from the world, have been positioned in direct contradiction to core Buddhist teachings. However, as Jain has pointed out, commodification of spiritual and religious practices does not preclude a meaningful and religious engagement with these practices by individuals (Jain 2015). There are also divides between the meditation practices of western converts to Buddhism and communities of Buddhists that have multi-generations of affiliation with Buddhism and are often first- and second-generation immigrants to English-speaking cultures. An emphasis on meditation practices by the former has served to diminish the role of ritual, merit-making, and the importance of Buddhism in preserving other languages and cultures in the latter (Cheah 2011).

Yoga schools and studios are increasingly engaging in the profitable enterprises of destination retreats and teacher-training programmes. Ironically, the desire to engage in yoga tourism – as part of a wellness vacation, spiritual retreat or a residential teacher-training – as an attempt to be more spiritual or authentic about yoga practice, often strengthens the commercialised, neoliberal and globalised nature of the yoga industry as well orientalist constructs about a mystic India (Lehto et al. 2006; Maddox 2015; Bowers and Cheer 2017; McCartney 2020). A growing number of people are training to be yoga teachers, with some trainings demonstrating an unsustainable Ponzi-like model of two aspiring yoga teachers for every one that is currently active (Einstein 2017). The proliferation of teachers also points to issues that have arisen around standards and accreditation, such as who should be considered a teacher of these practices, what would qualify someone to be such a teacher and what role accrediting institutions should play in establishing standards and enforcing codes of conduct.

Recent decades have seen the unearthing of a staggering number of scandals involving yoga and Buddhist gurus and meditation teachers who engaged in sexual misconduct, abusive behaviour and exploitation of their students (e.g. Bell 2002; Remski 2019). In some cases, this has caused the restructuring of organisations or the reappraisal of their history. Some critics have argued that these cases of abuse and misconduct are facilitated by, or even inherent to, the deference and authority within the traditional guru–śiṣya or teacher–student model of mentorship and should be abandoned for more democratic and open structures. It is not clear what further changes the role of guru, which has already undergone substantial shifts over the last century, will see in the future. It is possible that the model of the guru as a gatekeeper of traditional
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wisdom and object of ritual devotion largely will be overtaken by other structures, even if it persists in some contexts (Lucia 2018; Goldberg and Singleton 2014).

One of the subtexts in the dozens of guru scandals has been the role played by the internet and social media, which has allowed for the amplification of victims' voices and the rapid and open sharing of information in a way that was not possible in previous decades. It is sure to be one of many ways that technology will shape the future of yoga and meditation. The recent array of meditation and mindfulness apps, as well as yoga routine apps, for smartphones are likely to dramatically increase not only the already expanding number of those who meditate, but also further establish meditation and mindfulness techniques as individual pursuits done for specific pragmatic benefits, divorced from religious traditions, ethics or communities.

Conclusion

In the anglophone context, yoga and meditation hold unique and flexible forms of cultural power and influence. In the United States, Britain and Commonwealth countries these practices receive the benefits of being perceived as spiritual, but without the negative connotations associated with organised religion. They are viewed as simultaneously progressive and innovative, but still ancient and traditional. They can be undertaken for individual betterment and practical benefit, while also being perceived as universal and altruistic. They can be supported by medical science but are not dependent on it. Yoga can have an unquestioned place in either a health club or an individual’s description of their spiritual life, just as mindfulness and meditation can effortlessly move from hospitals and schools to corporate seminars and retreats.

Although many academic commentators have noted that they have been researching ‘modern anglophone yoga’, the distinguishing features and historical context of the anglophone aspect of this phrase has yet to be expanded as an analytic category. We would suggest that a more linguistic-based analysis of the structure of English as a medium of translation and pedagogy might also prove fruitful and produce innovative understandings of the transformations of yoga and meditation practices in the modern period. However, this task is complicated by the fact that English is used as both a lingua franca of the transnational, cosmopolitan elite and as a vernacular language used for specifically local expressions and actions aimed at subverting dominant narratives and practices. It might be fair to say that the physically focused, often commercialised and ‘branded’ yoga forms of neoliberal yoga described by Jain (2015) characterise the majority of contemporary, cosmopolitan anglophone yoga. However, English is also the medium used within localised resistances to the dominant culture (e.g. Wildcroft 2020) and is sometimes vernacularised in a postcolonial reframing of yoga (e.g. Ward 2019).

It is hoped that this brief outline might serve as a critical jumping-off point for analysis of which themes and influences are distinctive in presentations of yoga and meditation in English, beyond the medium of presentation. We have highlighted the influence of Theosophy and New Thought (in the form of Yogi Ramacharaka), physical culture, adult education, the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s, English as a language of medicalisation and the accelerated commodification of these practices from the 1980s onwards in the English-speaking world. Although these trends broadly follow the linguistic binary framings of mind/body and science/religion as identified by King (2019), the pervasive popularity and diversity of yoga and meditation during the modern period in anglophone contexts also points to the limitations of these binaries in accurately expressing how people are experiencing the world through these practices.
Notes

1 For Yoga Body, Mark Singleton defined the object of his study more specifically as 'forms of yoga that were formulated and transmitted in a dialogical relationship between India and the West through the medium of English' (2010: 9–10; emphasis in the original).

2 Sivananda’s influence was also strong through the English-as-a-second language correspondents Boris Sacharow (1899–1959) in Germany and Harry Dickman (born Hārijs Dīkmanis, 1895–1979) in Latvia, who both further extended his influence (Fuchs 1990; McConnell 2016).

3 Adult education structures were also influential in several other European nations including Germany and Bulgaria (Jacobsen and Sardella 2020).

4 The first language of the Iyengar family was Tamil, and they also spoke Kannada.

5 A ‘Ponzi scheme’ or pyramid scheme is a common form of fraud where the initial investors profit off the ‘training’ of subsequent investors, with all the profit being made from other individuals hoping to profit from the training rather than by sales of a product to another audience.

6 More historical data about scandals involving particular groups and teachers were well-documented by media and academics, particularly in the 1970s and ‘80s in the emerging field of ‘New Religious Movement’ studies within sociology of religion. Some of this literature is detailed in Newcombe (2009).

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