Editorial

Geoffrey Samuel

This is officially the first issue of the new editorship of Asian Medicine: Tradition and Modernity. Vivienne Lo and I congratulate the new editorial team, Marta Hanson and Mona Schrempf, and wish them good fortune with their new task. With two experienced scholars at the helm, and a more solid financial basis than the journal has had for some years, we feel confident about the future of IASTAM’s journal. Editing Asian Medicine has been an extraordinary and very positive experience for both Vivienne and I; not least, in my case, because of the opportunity it has afforded to get to know personally so many of the leading scholars in this field, but it is time for both of us to move on.

The present issue is however transitional, in that Vivienne and I are still involved, though in the capacity of guest editors. The issue derives from a panel, ‘Cultivating Perfection and Longevity’, which we jointly organised in September 2009 at the Seventh International Conference on Traditional Asian Medicine (ICTAM) in Thimphu, Bhutan. Of the ten papers in that panel, revised versions of five are included here, along with three additional papers. The issue also includes a practitioner’s report and two book reviews.

‘Cultivating Perfection and Longevity’ was intended to be a theme that could encompass approaches from both the Sinitic and Indo-Tibetan cultural regions. Five of the academic articles here refer to forms of self-cultivation within Chinese traditions. The other three are on Tibet (two) and India (one). A third Tibetan presentation at the conference, my own contribution (‘Tibetan Longevity Practices: The Body in Buddhist Tantric Ritual’), is being published elsewhere.¹ The wide spread of material in this issue brings to the fore a couple of questions that have been around for a while: are the Indian and Tibetan practices doing ‘the same thing’ as the Chinese ones? What, if any, is the historical relationship between them?

Neither question can be given a conclusive or straightforward answer at this point in time, but exploring them provides some important context for the

¹ Samuel, forthcoming; see also Samuel 2012.
articles in this issue. To begin with, it is worth looking at the history of these practices in the two regions separately, since the development of the practices is complex in both cases. In both regions, too, the practices tend to cut across the standard categorisations of contemporary thought. Are these practices medical or religious? Do they relate to health, physical exercise, alchemy, erotic science, martial arts or spiritual cultivation? In both the Indo-Tibetan and East Asian traditions we can find elements that might be classified in any of these ways. It is also evident that practitioners at various times might be more concerned with one or another dimension. A key issue for all of these practices though is that they would seem to involve concepts and experiences that might be seen as located *between* our modern concepts of mind and body, in what is often referred to as the ‘subtle body’. On the Chinese side, a central concept here is *qi*, on the Indic and Tibetan *prāṇa* (Tibetan *rlung*). In both cases these terms form part of a complex and sophisticated body of concepts, which can be encountered in a variety of different forms and expressions.

The early forms of the Chinese practices, until fairly recently, were known primarily from a body of texts that might easily be categorised as ‘religious’, since they formed part of the complex current of Chinese thought and practice known as Daoism. While the Daoisms traceable back to the Celestial Masters (Tianshi 天師) or Orthodox Unity (Zhengyi 正義) schools of the 2nd century CE and the Upper Clarity (Shangqing 上清) and Numinous Treasure (Lingbao 靈寳) schools of the 4th century CE, have taken mainly pejorative stances towards *yangsheng* 养生 in their early centuries, over the years Daoist catalogues incorporated and preserved *yangsheng* materials as a process of accretion. One important text which collected excerpts from early scriptures dating back to the 2nd Century CE is the *Yangsheng yaoji* 養生要集. Now lost, it is preserved in other texts, primarily the *Yangxing yanning lu* 養性延命錄, the *Zhubing yuanhou lun* 諸病源候論 and the *Ishinpō* 醫心方. A key element of many of these scriptures were processes of self-cultivation which utilised exercises and practices intended to direct and harmonise the *qi*. Arguing against the accepted academic view, Stanley-Baker’s article shows how body-focused techniques, often directed towards the healing of illness, were not just preparatory exercises but a feature of all levels of higher spiritual practice. The ultimate aim was to purify the internal flows of *qi* 氣, which many considered to grant the state of a *xian* 仙, a transcendent immortal.

The discovery of 2nd century BCE manuscripts in Han dynasty tombs at Mawangdui and elsewhere, from the early 1970s onwards, led to a substantial

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2 Samuel and Johnston 2013.
3 Vivienne Lo is responsible for the following brief survey of Chinese practices.
revision in our understanding of the early part of these traditions. These newly-discovered texts dealt with medicine, erotics, physical exercises, and the like, and included many practices that are also found in the later more religiously-oriented texts. Some of the tomb texts were not especially concerned with higher spiritual goals. The focus was rather on living a good life, for those members of the aristocracy and scholarly elite who had the leisure and personal circumstances to devote to such pursuits. Others were dedicated to attaining *shenming* 神明, an ‘illumination of the spirits’, an internally radiant state with keen vision, acute hearing and a feeling of sturdiness and strength consistent with the prospect of long life. Sadly, we have yet to excavate any manuscript pertaining to the category of *shenxian* 神仙, ‘transcendence’ so tantalisingly recorded as the last entry in the Han bibliographic treatises of the imperial library. Nevertheless, given the titles, we can assume some common practices if not shared ambitions. Vivienne Lo, who has described this material at length, both in her doctoral research and in a number of more recent publications, has talked about a ‘culture of *yangsheng*’, using one of the principal terms by which these practices came to be known in later times (*yangsheng*). *Yangsheng* literally means ‘nurturing life’, and implies a focus on physical culture and longevity.

A brief survey of Chinese self-cultivation practices from our present vantage point must then commence with the Han dynasty tomb-texts since they have the advantage of being located in time and space and provide a higher quality of evidence than those conceptually related pre-imperial sources which are retrospectively labelled Daoist such as *Laozi* 老子, *Zhuangzi* 庄子, as well as *Guanzi* 管子, the earliest mystical text to describe inner cultivation. With the collapse of the Han dynasty in 220 CE, these traditions became progressively linked up with religious and political aims, leading to the development of the organised Daoist schools (Tianshi, Shangqing, etc.) of the 3rd and 4th centuries, which would eventually achieve imperial patronage under several of the Tang and Song emperors. By this time, many of the more mundane bodily techniques are all pervasive, to re-appear in medical, religious and secular contexts. Ge Hong 葛洪 says in *Baopuzi* 抱朴子 that breathing and stretching practices are two a penny, and therefore inferior to his brand of alchemy.

The early *yangsheng* traditions also influenced schools of external and Daoist internal alchemy, the latter of which became prominent from the 8th century onwards. These again aimed at the achievement of transcendent immortality

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6 Lo 1998.
7 For example, Lo 2007, 2008; Lo and Stanley-Baker 2011.
8 See also Dear, this issue.
External alchemy (waidan 外丹) aimed to produce the elixir from substances external to the body, notably including mercury and other heavy metals along with animal and plant substances, while internal alchemy (neidan 内丹) aimed at similar results through processes of inner transformation of qi.

By medieval times, these were either elite traditions or big communal cults which had followers at hinterland mountain temples where people went for healing and drugs. The fundamental practices of Celestial Masters, (the original Daoist religion)—and the source of their broad appeal—were healing rituals, albeit of a fashion which abstained from yangsheng. In contrast, later developments involve a kind of popularisation of self-cultivation regimens, in which they became available to a much wider class of people. During the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) we see larger groups participating in the material and visual culture associated with self-improvement. Illustrated books that describe and depict how to ‘cultivate life’ become a must-have for would-be elites, both as a reflection of their new affluence, but also for their vivid instructions, a development described in Chen Hsiu-fen’s article in this issue. A flood of courtly Daoist and Buddhist ritual practices took place in the Song/Yuan, when they spread around the country generating weird and wonderful practices. As Dear describes in his article, the ancient and elite regimens were reinvented in the twentieth century as part of a socialist orientation towards ‘health for all’, most familiar in the massive popularity of qi practices in therapeutic exercise and various styles of Taiji quan 太極拳, which again derive much of their philosophy and content from the yangsheng tradition, albeit in a secularised form. Those practices with more esoteric claims, those with key figures who boast supernatural powers, or that are part of the regimen of religious communities are always in danger of being labelled as xie 邪, unorthodox and politically deviant or wei 邪, duplicitous and irrational. More recently, in the twenty-first century, there has been a return to the Ming leisure and lifestyle culture of self-improvement, now increasingly integrated into a contemporary commercialised society.

On the Indian side, the early period is less clear and seems more explicitly caught up with ‘spiritual’ goals. The Upaniṣads and early Buddhist and Jaina practices suggest a partly shared ascetic milieu, within which practitioners from all three traditions were undertaking similar combinations of practices entraining both body and consciousness, but our material here is sketchy. A body of techniques fully paralleling the elaboration and complexity of the Chinese material can only be clearly demonstrated with the appearance of full-blown Tantric internal practices in the 7th and 8th centuries CE.9

9 Samuel 2008.
Within the Tantric context, we find many of the same elements as in China, but expressed in a substantially different and characteristically South Asian vocabulary; alchemical practices aimed at immortality involving mercury, internal yogic practices involving both specific locations and ‘channels’ between them along which subtle substances might be moved, exercises involving posture, breathing and consciousness which appear aimed at stimulating such movement along the ‘channels’ and training its awareness. These elements appeared as part of all the major Indian religious traditions (Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, Jaina, Buddhist) at around the same time. A variety of semi-legendary teachers, the mahāsiddhas or ‘great adepts’, were shared in part between these religious traditions, each of which developed a canonical list of 84 teachers. Here the focus was, for the most part, explicitly spiritual, although pragmatic and this-worldly rituals and practices were also recognised as a valid part of the tradition, and approached with related techniques. Medical and alchemical authors were however part of the same scene.

On the Hindu side, these practices existed in elite forms, but were spread at a more popular level through the Nāth community. The Buddhist versions became part of a series of interrelated Tantric lineages (Guhyasamāja, Cakrasamvara, Hevajra, Kālacakra, which were passed on to Nepal and Tibet. The last major Indian Tantric cycle, the Kālacakra, incorporated astrology, alchemy, medicine and many other ingredients in a grand synthesis.

However, a counter-movement of opposition to Tantric practice grew up in India. This movement, associated with the name of the great Hindu scholar Śaṅkara, focused on opposition to the sexual and antinomian elements of Tantra, though what was at issue may often have been more to do with the increasing entanglement of Tantric ritual with the power of the State. The counter-movement led to a degree of marginalisation of Tantric practice, which was either ‘cleaned up’ or replaced by bhakti (devotional) cults. The imposition of Muslim rule further weakened the Tantric cults, if only by removing much of the State support for Tantra, though there was also a more positive interaction with Islam: Islamic (Sufi) versions of Tantric practices developed, and are not necessarily simple derivatives of the Hindu or Buddhist versions. In more recent times, colonial rule, missionary activity and

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11 Walter 1980; White 1996.
15 For example, Milani 2013; Salomon 1991.
the growth of a puritanical Indian bourgeoisie added further to the marginalisation of Tantra. The postures and movements of hatha yoga, originally developed as an integral part of Tantric practice, were progressively re-invented as a series of physical techniques for health and relaxation, in time becoming one of India’s major cultural exports to the West.\footnote{Alter 2005; de Michalis 2004. See also Hilary Re’em’s practice report in this issue.}

Today, while Tantric practice can be found in most parts of the Indian sub-continent, it has lost most of its social esteem or status. The tradition of mercury-based alchemical medicine (rasāyana, Tibetan bcud len) associated with the Tantras nevertheless remains a significant part of the Indian medical tradition, both in Ayurveda and in the South Indian tradition of Siddha or Cittar medicine, which retains a strong Tantric component. Roman Sieler’s article in this issue discusses a sub-tradition of Siddha medicine, that deals with varma maruttuvam or ‘vital spot treatments,’ a topic closely connected with the South Indian martial art tradition. The connections between self-cultivation, medicine and martial arts provide another intriguing parallel to the East Asian context.

The Tibetans imported the Buddhist version of Tantra (Vajrayāna) as part of their adoption of Indian-style Buddhism in the 8th to 12th centuries. Vajrayāna Buddhism was preserved and also developed further in Tibet, where it became institutionalised at all levels from lay village practitioners and remote hermitages to vast teaching monasteries with many thousands of monks and close links to State power. The rNying ma school with its associated tradition of visionary texts and practices, the so-called gter ma tradition, was a particularly creative context, of which Ian Baker’s article gives an example. The Tibetans also adopted parts of the tradition of mercury-based alchemical medicine (rasāyana, Tibetan bcud len) associated with the Tantras, and this became an important part of the Tibetans’ own medical tradition. Barbara Gerke’s article in this issue looks at how this tradition is being reinterpreted by contemporary Tibetan medical practitioners.

Historical connections in some form between the Indic and East Asian practices are almost certain, and have been suggested at least since Jean Filliozat’s 1969 essay.\footnote{Filliozat 1969.} As David Gordon White points out, mercury, a key component of the medical and alchemical side of the Indian tradition, was imported from China in the form of cinnabar,\footnote{White 1996, p. 53.} and it is hard to believe that knowledge of its uses was not also traded and transmitted along the trade routes. The Nāth complex with its long-life focus is particularly reminiscent of
Chinese approaches.\textsuperscript{19} Yet the Indian and Chinese versions are expressed quite differently, and the nature and degree of contact is hard to estimate. \textit{Prāṇa} is part of an Indian complex of ideas and cannot simply be equated to \textit{qi}, even if both concepts came to cover similar areas and phenomena. If there was probably borrowing, there was certainly also creative reworking and transformation.\textsuperscript{20}

Whether those who patronised Tantric traditions at their height were primarily interested in spiritual perfection is a moot point. Kings and emperors, the wealthy and the powerful, were conspicuous at the upper end of the market, and perhaps it is understandable if the market evolved to cater to their needs and desires.\textsuperscript{21} The focus on erotics and sexology makes sense in these royal contexts, which are indeed visualised in the Chinese dialogues (and perhaps hinted at in those Indian tantras, such as the \textit{Vīnāśikha}, which are phrased as dialogues between Śiva and the goddess). The royal Kashmiri patrons of Tantra were scathingly dismissed by later historians, and their involvement in Tantra ridiculed.\textsuperscript{22} The royal patrons of Tibet, by contrast, were celebrated as Buddhist heroes by later Tibetan tradition, as with King Khri srong lde’u btsan, who was regarded as a close Tantric disciple of Padmasambhava. In both cases, however, Tantra’s appeal to the highest levels of the State is evident. Often, as with the Mongols and Manchus, \textit{Realpolitik} and desires for the pragmatic goals on offer may have gone hand in hand with a measure of genuine spiritual motivation. Similar issues arose in the Chinese context, where a whole series of Tang Dynasty emperors appear to have died early deaths as a result of alchemical potions administered by Taoist adepts.\textsuperscript{23}

In India, as royal patronage dwindled, Tantric practitioners moved down the social scale, and much of what survives is of a humble village nature, as with today’s Nāth and Baul practitioners. Royal patronage never vanished entirely, even for the more antinomian brands of Tantric practice, which were perhaps seen as having a natural affinity with royal power. Tantra as the barely licit, as the secret source of suspect power (including power to achieve health, longevity and sexual potency), was something rulers might see as a necessary component of the armoury of the state. Several Rajas of the important princely state of Darbhanga in the early 20th century were patrons of Tantra,\textsuperscript{24} and the

\textsuperscript{19} Schaeffer 2002.
\textsuperscript{20} Cf., Samuel 2008, pp. 278–82.
\textsuperscript{21} Samuel 2008, pp. 296–309.
\textsuperscript{22} Rabe 1996.
\textsuperscript{23} See Dear, this issue.
\textsuperscript{24} Brown 1996, p. 724.
Rajas of Puri also kept up a court Tantric priestly establishment with a repertoire of unbowdlerised Tantric practices into modern times.25

Here again, as in the Chinese material, we see the importance of the question of the social milieu of self-cultivation practices. Many ancient and more modern forms of these practices delineated class boundaries; they defined the nature of a genteel and civilised existence, such as distinguished the elite from the mass of the population, or they specified esoteric forms of religious behaviour only appropriate for elite groups.

In Tibet, Tantra became a basic and central constituent of the Tibetan religion and civilisation, an essential technology both for spiritual transcendence and everyday life, and the lamas and yogins who were its recognised transmitters and masters constituted in time a major part of the society’s elite and many of its political authorities.26 At the same time, the more extreme forms of Tantric practice were interpreted figuratively or symbolically, and the claims of Tantra to provide unlimited worldly power treated with a certain pragmatic realism. While the Tantric Nāth yogins in India emphasised immortality as a key goal (one of the more suggestive forms of evidence for a Chinese connection),27 immortality got quietly shelved within the Tibetan context. Health and long life remained major issues, but were generally justified in terms of the need to maintain health and extend life as a basis for spiritual progress. The ‘siddhi of long life’ was pragmatically rethought in terms of practices to strengthen health and vitality,28 while the alchemical elixirs, as in India, became restorative tonics rather than medicines for the attainment of immortal life.29

The literature on self-cultivation in China, and the similar and parallel literatures in South Asia and Tibet, provide an original and revealing perspective on the spiritual traditions of these regions. Through the records of self-cultivation we can gain access to a much more intimate history of the body, albeit mostly an elite body, than is allowed by other sources. The Chinese texts in particular, notwithstanding the elite nature of the record, allows us to texture, along the way, a history of how women’s pleasure was perceived, albeit appropriated within a male-oriented sexual alchemy. As records of the experienced self, these texts bring us closer to a sensory experience of the past, sometimes in a kind of liberating synaesthesia that collapsed the boundaries of inner

25 See, for example, Marglin 1985.
26 Samuel 1993.
27 See, for example, Schaeffer 2002.
29 Gerke, this issue.
and outer worlds, sometimes in a more restrained context focused on the proper care of the body’s internal processes to maintain health and vitality.

The first five articles present various perspectives on self-cultivation in Chinese traditions. These articles serve to highlight how very different techniques of breathing and working with *qi*, for example, could be: sometimes deployed to cure aches and pains as an end in itself; at other times as precursors to a Salvationist journey where the deities themselves were emanations of *qi* and had to be ingested into the body. Basic physical exercises like massage for healing the body remained an essential part of esoteric Daoist repertoires of practice and were included at the highest level of practice aimed at transcendence.

At the same time, there were hierarchies of practice, and we can see scorn thrown on different groups for ‘getting it wrong’, and having mundane everyday ambitions. Even though, in medieval China, many of the practices are shared across professional medical, religious worlds, and are evident in everyday social contexts (of those who had the leisure), the aspirations were not the same.

The opening article in this collection, by David Dear, gives a general introduction to the development of *yangsheng* practices, but focuses in particular on the recent revival of *yangsheng* practices in modern China. Dear provides a ‘thick description’ of *yangsheng* as it is seen in contemporary China. He shows how the commercialisation of *yangsheng* has created a vast new audience for these techniques and practices. *Yangsheng* today is about maintaining good health and enjoying life. It also provides a context in which sexual advice and techniques can be discussed more or less openly.

Rodo Pfister’s study takes up the sexual dimension of *yangsheng* in more detail. His article looks at the gendered conception of sexual pleasure in *yangsheng* texts, presenting a detailed analysis of passages from three texts from very different stages of the development of the tradition, ranging from two Mawangdui texts from the 2nd century BCE, via a sixth-century text reworked in the tenth-century Japanese *Ishinpō*, to the sixteenth-century CE Ming printed text, the *Su nü miaoolun* (‘Wondrous Treatise of the Plain Woman’). As Pfister notes, these texts pay great attention to the female sexual partner’s pleasure and satisfaction. Where men were advised restraint, a woman was ‘staged in her full potency’ in the lead-up to and experience of orgasm. Comparison between the three texts shows the development and systematic use of standard formulae and conceptual elements. The general programme remains constant, in that the male partner is expected to control his own excitement, and above all avoid ejaculation, while systematically arousing and monitoring the woman’s reactions. The pay-off for the man is partly in terms of his own pleasure, but primarily in the nourishing and health-giving ingestion of female vitality and potency.
Gil Raz’s article traces a specific *yangsheng* technique, the ingestion of *qi* from the five dimensions of space, known as ingesting the Five Sprouts. The organised Daoist schools were concerned with healing from early on. The initial emphasis, unlike in the secular medical tradition, was on ritual means for remedying the harmful effects of noxious or deviant *qi*, which was in its turn generally the result of affliction by spirits. These practices seem however to have accompanied rather than replaced orthodox medical treatment. At the same time, Daoists also developed practices for ingesting pure *qi*, of which the Five Sprouts technique was and remains one of the best known. The Five Sprouts practice involves a combination of a breathing technique with the swallowing of saliva, and is described as removing three ‘worms’ or ‘couching corpses,’ pathogenic agents within the body. Raz traces various versions of this technique in a number of early texts excerpted in the Tang dynasty writings of Sima Chengzhen (647–735), in the first- or second-century *Laozi zhongjing* (‘Central Scripture of Laozi’), and in several other texts. In these various texts, the Five Sprouts practice is ‘embedded in a variety of ritual and cosmological schemes’. The practice can be seen as part of a historical move away from the use of dangerous herbal preparations towards safer breathing-based approaches, but Raz ends by suggesting that the Five Sprouts might make more sense in modern scientific terms than is at first obvious.

Michael Stanley-Baker’s article, based on an analysis of a body of fourth-century texts from the Upper Clarity (Shangqing) school, looks in detail at the use of massage within the Shangqing tradition. Shangqing Daoism, as we have already noted, was spiritual rather than secular. While it recognised the need to cure disease and the further need to nourish vitality (i.e. *yangsheng*), its real goal was transcendence (*chengxian*), which Stanley-Baker describes as ‘a higher biospiritual state associated with supernatural powers and longevity or immortality’. Beyond this was the higher state of ‘perfection’, achieved by the meditation on the body gods taught in the school’s highest practice text, the *Dadong zhenjing* (‘Great Cavern Scripture’).

In theory, massage belonged at the *yangsheng* level in this hierarchy of practices, but Stanley-Baker suggests that the stress on embodied subjectivity and of awareness of the interior self associated with massage in fact links it to the highest levels of Shangqing practice. For the Shangqing school, perfection was a state firmly grounded in awareness of physiological process, and Shangqing practices offer significant possibilities for scientific understanding.

The fifth paper on China, by Chen Hsiu-fen, discusses the popularisation of *yangsheng* techniques during the Ming dynasty through health manuals, and looks in particular at the role of illustrations and of mnemonic verses, songs and maxims in these manuals. She suggests that these pictorial and
textual practices were a way of appealing to a new literate and semi-literate leadership. The illustrations mostly refer to *daoyin* exercises (guiding and stretching) exercises, and provide visual clues as to the kind of people envisaged as practitioners of the techniques, and the material culture with which they might surround themselves. The growth of illustration in *yangsheng* texts formed part of a wider expansion of illustrations in texts of all kinds, and in part was no doubt explainable as a marketing strategy to make the texts more attractive and accessible to a new wider public. In the closing sections of her article, Chen discusses the use of short verses and maxims as demonstrating parallel processes of popularisation and simplification of what had been in previous centuries a largely elite culture.

India is represented by two articles in this issue. The first is Roman Sieler’s study of the intersection of medicine and martial arts in the *varmakkalai*, the ‘art of the vital spots’, in South India. While the therapeutic techniques of the *varmakkalai* are recognised as a sub-division of Siddha medicine, the traditional teachers (*ācān*), mostly from hereditary backgrounds, see the combination of fighting and healing as central to their tradition. Therapeutic and martial techniques are learned side by side; the same knowledge of vulnerable spots within the body can be used to cause injury or to promote healing. The aim of both aspects of the training is a kind of ‘psychosomatic intuition’. The technique of the *ācān* incorporates Tantric ideas of the subtle body and the control over internal flows of *prāṇa* (*pirāṇam* in Tamil), and a variety of related esoteric practices. Sieler suggests in closing that seeing the close connections of healing and martial arts practices in *varmakkalai* might assist in understanding the wider context of both the ‘science’ of medicine and of ‘arts’ such as fighting, dance and theatre in India.

The issue closes with a second India-related piece, Hilary Re’em’s practice report on yoga in the UK, but before that there are two articles on Tibet. In the first of these, Ian Baker discusses the relationship between the physical practices of Tibetan yoga (*khrul ’khor*) and the spiritual goal, Buddhahood or Enlightenment, that they are intended to facilitate. His key example is constituted by a chapter from a text by the Bhutanese ‘treasure-revealer’ (*gter ston*) Padma gling pa (1450–1521) and a series of seventeenth-century mural paintings in a Lhasa temple, the Lukhang, which illustrate the practices in these texts. The basic orientation here is that of Dzogchen (rDzogs chen), a non-Tantric, body-oriented approach to the attainment of Buddhahood developed through a series of Tibetan revealed teachings from the 11th and 12th centuries onwards. Physical exercises form an important component of the practice of Dzogchen teachings, as of their Tantric equivalents, and Pema Lingpa’s text includes a series of 23 yogic movements that are depicted in the Lukhang’s murals.
Dzogchen also makes use of the Tantric physiology of channels and centres (cakra, Tibetan 'khor lo), and the chapter Baker translates outlines this system as well as describing how it is used in practice.

The second Tibetan article, by Barbara Gerke, brings us back to a world of contemporary commercialisation parallel to that discussed in Dear’s opening piece. We have already met bcud len (literally, ‘essence extraction’) as a translation of the Sanskrit term for the Indian alchemic tradition, rasāyana. In its later Tibetan usage, it also has a more specific meaning, the ingestion of alchemically-derived pills as a support to longevity practice and other related Tantric techniques. Present-day Tibetan medical practitioners are however reinterpreting bcud len in terms of ‘health tonics’ and ‘dietary supplements’. The Men-Tsee-Khang, the traditional Tibetan medical institute at Dharamsala, which runs clinics throughout and beyond India and Nepal, has been particularly involved in the commercialisation of bcud len-derived recipes as part of their Sorig range. Gerke discusses the background to this development, and also examines a number of the Sorig products in some detail. She examines the language used in selling these products, but also tries to understand how contemporary Tibetan practitioners in India, themselves situated in the border area between traditional Tibetan knowledge and modern science, make sense of these products and the complex and multivalent body of concepts underlying the term bcud len.

The final article in this issue brings us back to India, or rather to Indian yoga as taught and practised in the UK from the 1970s to the present day. Hilary Re’em’s personal account of her initial encounters with yoga and of her training as a yoga practitioner give a valuable and revealing perspective on the ways in which self-cultivation techniques, originally from the Indian Tantric context but now in a relatively secularised form, were rethought within their new Western context. Re’em also reminds us in her article that despite its successive reconstruction in India and in the West, yoga retains a genuine healing potential.

Indeed, while some of what is described in the studies in this issue may seem too culturally distant and exotic to be of relevance in the contemporary world, and other features may seem to have gone too far in the opposite direction, and to have become little more than another commodity in the global market-place, the yangsheng, Tantric and other related practices of China, India and Tibet retain much of their interest and significance today. In a world where medical care itself is increasingly dominated by commercial imperatives and the marketing policies of Big Pharma, even those of us who, unlike much of the world’s population, have reasonable access to biomedicine may find the idea of taking care of one’s own mental and physical health
entirely meaningful. As several of our authors suggest, the techniques and practices they describe may well make good sense even in contemporary scientific terms. The articles in this issue are little more than a sample of what might be needed for a comprehensive survey of the field of self-cultivation in East Asia, India and Tibet. We hope, however, that there is enough here to indicate the significance of our topic, and to encourage the reader to explore further in these traditions, both for their intrinsic interest and for their potential usefulness. Above all, the yangsheng and other self-cultivation traditions are of significance in demonstrating the possibility of a true unity of bodily and spiritual orientations, and that remains an ideal which any genuine healing, of self or others, needs to respect and to strive towards.

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