



## "MOTHER OF YOGA": ZHANG HUILAN, CHRIS BUTLER, AND THE POPULARIZATION OF YOGA IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

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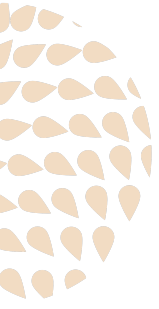
### Abstract

The past and present development of modern yoga within the People's Republic of China (PRC) remains sorely understudied. To date, the vast majority of research written in English has dealt only with the practice's manifestations in the United States, Western Europe, and India. This paper responds by investigating the initial popularization of modern yoga in the PRC during the 1980s by Zhang Huilan 张蕙兰, contemporary China's so-called "mother of yoga," and her guru, Chris Butler. It examines Zhang and Butler's books from the period alongside their audio and visual material in light of the political, economic, and cultural context in which they emerged. It offers an explanation for why Zhang and Butler's yoga was successful despite the stiff competition it faced from local psychophysical- and biospiritual-cultivation practices, namely *qigong* 气功. It explores why their brand was tolerated (possibly even supported) by authorities at a time when the Chinese state was actively promoting science in conjunction with indigenous forms of medicine and healing. Finally, it provides a reason for why Zhang and Butler were able to overcome the tumults of the 1990s and the crackdown on self-cultivation practices spurred by the Falun Gong 法轮功 incidents of 1999.

### KEYWORDS

Yoga, China, Zhang Huilan, Chris Butler, *qigong*, ISKCON, Hare Krishnas, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, religion.





Despite the People's Republic of China (PRC) being the most populated country in the world and replete with yogis, the past and present development of modern yoga within its borders is sorely understudied. To date, the vast majority of research written in English has dealt only with the practice's manifestations in the United States, Western Europe, and India.<sup>1</sup> *The Routledge Handbook of Yoga and Meditation Studies* has sought to break from this trend by offering chapters on yoga in Southeast Asia, Korea, Japan, and Latin America.<sup>2</sup> Yet, as editors Karen O'Brien-Kop and Suzanne Newcombe lament in their introduction to the text, a China-focused study is missing.<sup>3</sup> Only a single work—Benôit Vermander, Liz Hingley, and Liang Zhang's ethnography, *Shanghai Sacred*—touches on the subject at all, and only then in a cursory manner as it explores the multireligious landscape of the PRC's financial capital.<sup>4</sup> Beyond this, yoga in China remains ignored.

I venture a small step towards rectifying this neglect by investigating the initial popularization of modern yoga in the PRC during the 1980s by Zhang Huilan 张蕙兰 (b. 1955), contemporary China's so-called “mother of yoga” (*dangdai Zhongguo de yujia zhi mu* 当代中国的瑜伽之母), and her guru, Chris Butler (b. 1948).<sup>5</sup> I examine Zhang and Butler's books from the period alongside their audio and visual material in light of the political, economic, and cultural context in which they emerged. I offer an explanation for why Zhang and Butler's yoga was successful despite the stiff competition it faced from local psychophysical- and biospiritual-cultivation practices, namely *qigong* 气功.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I follow Elizabeth De Michelis in understanding “modern yoga” as referring to “the graft of a Western branch onto the Indian tree of yoga,” which gradually took shape as India encountered Western imperialism and modernity. See De Michelis (2004: 2). Yet, I do find that a fluvial metaphor à la Tweed (2008) is preferable to De Michelis's sylvan one. For studies on yoga in the United States, see, for example, Dazy (2005), Syman (2010), and Deslippe (2018). For work on yoga in Western Europe, see De Michelis (1995), Augenstein (2013), and Newcombe (2019). For research on yoga in India, see Alter (1997) and (2004). For a monograph that works across some of these boundaries, see Strauss (2005).

<sup>2</sup> Also see McCartney (2020).

<sup>3</sup> O'Brien-Kop and Newcombe (2021: 8).

<sup>4</sup> Vermander, Hingley, and Zhang (2018: 165–71).

<sup>5</sup> This sobriquet is widely used to refer to Zhang in mainland China. I have encountered it being used by scholars, state-media personnel, and practitioners alike.

<sup>6</sup> *Qigong* literally translates to something like “breathwork.” The term appears a few times in historical sources but should for all intents and purposes be considered a modern construction formulated by Chinese Communist Party cadre Liu Guizhen 刘贵真. Through Liu and his comrades, the term came “to encompass all traditional techniques for disciplining the mind, the breath, and the body.” See Goossaert and Palmer (2011: 120). Later, *qigong* would also include under its umbrella things like “trance, divination,

At the same time, I explore why their brand was tolerated (possibly even supported) by authorities at a time when the Chinese state was actively promoting science in conjunction with *indigenous* forms of medicine and healing. Finally, I provide a reason for why Zhang and Butler were able to overcome the tumults of the 1990s and the crackdown on self-cultivation practices spurred by the Falun Gong 法轮功 incidents of 1999.

## China, Butler, and Zhang

In December 1978, just a little over two years after the death of Mao Zedong 毛泽东 (1893–1976) and the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 (1904–1997), now at the helm of the People’s Republic of China, initiated major economic reforms, which would forever change the face of the country. Over the following years, moves were made away from collectivization, central planning, and state ownership. Privatization occurred on a large scale, including in the health sector, and the country began opening up to foreign investment.

Religion and various practices formerly deemed superstitious were granted room to breathe.<sup>7</sup> Yet, science, the key to Deng’s Four Modernizations (Si ge xiandaihua 四个现代化), remained hegemonic.<sup>8</sup> This power dynamic imbued existing efforts to “scientize” traditional healing practices with new vigour.<sup>9</sup> The search for a *Chinese* science, which might enable the PRC to leapfrog the West, also intensified. Throughout the 1980s and 90s, *qigong* was believed to offer an answer. Some spoke of “a super-science,” others of potential military applications.<sup>10</sup> More realistic individuals simply saw in *qigong* a cheap way to improve the country’s health, a necessary task if China was to ever be recognized

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charismatic healing, and talismanic techniques, as well as...paranormal phenomena, and UFOs” Palmer (2007: 18).

<sup>7</sup> Goossaert and Palmer (2011: 316–17).

<sup>8</sup> Deng hoped to modernize agriculture, industry, defense, and science and technology. However, of these, the fourth was the most important. Deng called it “the key to the four modernizations” for “without modern science and technology, it is impossible to build modern agriculture, modern industry or modern national defence.” Deng (1984: 102).

<sup>9</sup> Indeed, as Palmer observes, the immediate post-Mao era saw “scientism became the new creed for the development of the country.” Palmer (2007: 49).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 120 and 73–74.





as a developed and modern nation.<sup>11</sup> At the peak of the 1980s *qigong* boom (*qigong re* 气功热), millions of citizens were practicing the art at home and in parks, often as disciples of one of thousands of masters seeking to make a name for themselves.<sup>12</sup> It was under precisely these conditions that Zhang and Butler first entered mainland China.

Butler was born in New Orleans and later moved to Molokai, Hawaii with his parents.<sup>13</sup> Referred to by Chinese as Bo Zhongyan 柏忠言 and by his American disciples as Jagad Guru Siddhaswarupananda Paramahansa, Butler claims to have grown up in a Marxist household (although his mother insists it was Quaker).<sup>14</sup> Expelled from Kailua High, he finished secondary school at Kalani.<sup>15</sup> Thereafter, he began taking classes at the University of Hawai'i and, at around age twenty, claims to have attained what he calls the "Impersonal Brahman Aspect of the Absolute Truth," a state variously rendered into Chinese by Zhang as "the Ocean of White Light" (Bai guang haiyang 白光海洋), "Brahmanic Light" (Fan guang 梵光), and "the Impersonal Aspect of the Original Cause" (Yuanshi dongyin de fei rengen tedian 原始动因的非人格特点).<sup>16</sup> Sometime after this life-altering event, Butler dropped out of school, opened the Haiku Meditation Center, and began taking disciples to whom he taught *aṣṭāṅgayoga* and methods for awakening Kuṇḍalinī.<sup>17</sup> He first met members of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in 1969 at Diamond Head Crater's Sunshine Music Festival. They shared with him the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahāmantra*, which Butler then took and began promoting independently. The leader of ISKCON, A. C. Bhaktivedānta Svāmī Prabhupāda (1876–1977), responded swiftly to this new competition by declaring that Butler was an illegitimate spiritual teacher—an accusation which prompted the latter to join the movement himself in 1970.<sup>18</sup> While with ISKCON, Butler claims to have been drawn to

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<sup>11</sup> Strauss proposes that, "while illness is always a marked category, 'health' is not." She argues, "health is not only a central value of modernity, but also a marker for modernity, in the sense that development of nations is measured in part by a series of 'health indicators' such as morbidity and mortality rates." Strauss (2005: 6).

<sup>12</sup> Palmer calculates that, "at its height in the late 1980s, the *qigong* movement may have attracted over one hundred million practitioners in some form or another." Palmer (2007: 6).

<sup>13</sup> Wright (1977, sec. A).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Zhang and Bo (1986: 545).

<sup>17</sup> Jones and Ryan (2007: 411). I have been unable to determine from whom Butler learned these practices.

<sup>18</sup> Wright 1977, sec. A. For Butler's own account of this process, see Siddhara-svarūpa Dāsa (1971).

the personal aspect of the divine.<sup>19</sup> However, approximately four years after “offer[ing] himself and all his possessions at the feet of his [new] *guru*,” Butler became disillusioned with the Vaiṣṇava organization and criticized it for being like “a welfare state where they centralize food and sleeping and have control over [everyone].”<sup>20</sup> Although he had already abandoned ISKCON years earlier, it was not until after its founder’s death in 1977 that Butler began acting as an initiating (*dīkṣā*) *guru*.<sup>21</sup> That same year, he founded the Science of Identity Foundation—a tax-exempt, religious organization based in Hawaii—and, in 1994, assisted with the establishment of the World Vaiṣṇava Association.<sup>22</sup> To this day, he still considers Prabhupāda his *guru* and ultimately traces his lineage back through figures like Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Mahāprabhu (1486–1533 CE) to Kṛṣṇa himself.<sup>23</sup>

As for Zhang, not much is known about her other than the bits and pieces she herself provides. Also called Wai Lana and Vaiṣṇava Dās (Ch.: Wayishinawa Daxi 瓦伊史那瓦·达西), she was born and raised in Hong Kong.<sup>24</sup> Apparently, as a youth, she was materialistic and cared nothing for others.<sup>25</sup> She would smoke, skip school, and even dabbled with opiates. However, at the age of sixteen, she had a life-changing experience while hearing music at a party—music she eventually identified as Butler’s.<sup>26</sup> Later, Zhang saw her future *guru* speak at an event in Hong Kong and, sometime after that, while on retreat in Manila at Butler’s Science of Life Institute (Shengming benzhi kexueyuan 生命本质科学院), officially became his disciple.<sup>27</sup> Returning to Hong Kong, Zhang kept in contact with her teacher, who advised her via letter to start proselytizing

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<sup>19</sup> Science of Identity Foundation (2020).

<sup>20</sup> Wright (1977, sec. A).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* and Science of Identity Foundation (2020).

<sup>22</sup> The Science of Identity Foundation was originally called the Hari Nama Society (Jones and Ryan 2007: 412).

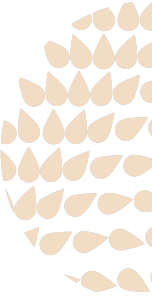
<sup>23</sup> Zhang and Bo (1986: 628).

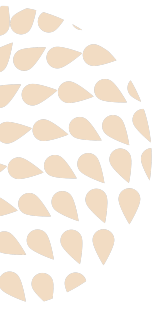
<sup>24</sup> Zhang and Bo (1986: 7).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 579.

<sup>26</sup> Huilan Yujia (2017). It is unclear which work of Butler’s so captivated Zhang. The earliest of his recordings I have been able to locate is the album *A Very Gentle Force: This World/A Different World*, which became available only in 1975.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* Also see Bo and Zhang (1983: 7).





in her homeland by translating and distributing his essays alongside her own.<sup>28</sup> In response, she launched a magazine called *Life Force, China* (*Shengmingli, Zhongguo* 生命力, 中国). Due to lack of sales, though, the publication flopped.<sup>29</sup>

In 1980, Zhang helped Butler acquire an invitation from the All-China Youth League (Zhonghua quanguo qingnian lianhehui 中华全国青年联合会) to tour various Chinese cities where he gave lectures on the social problems of the Western world and performed rock songs to a similar tune.<sup>30</sup> Dysentery cut his trip short, however. After only three or four months, Butler was forced to leave the country.<sup>31</sup> In 1982, he returned with his newly-formed Hawaiian rock band, Morning Sun (Zhaoyang 朝阳). That year, the group released its first album through the China Record Corporation (Zhongguo changpian zonggongsi 中国唱片总公司). In 1983, it produced a second and, in 1985, a third and a fourth. With music as his medium, Butler travelled across the country, denouncing hedonism and trumpeting the names of God.<sup>32</sup>

During his 1980 tour, a publisher approached him with the proposition to turn his lectures into a book.<sup>33</sup> This offer prompted Zhang and Butler to produce *Social Ills of the West: Drugs, Suicide, and Divorce* (*Xifang shehui bing: xidu, zisha, he lihun* 西方社会病——吸毒、自杀和离婚)—a collection of essays and interviews, some of which had previously appeared in *Life Force, China*. First printed in 1983, the text laments the social issues plaguing the developed world and declares hedonism as their root cause.<sup>34</sup> In 1985, Zhang also published a related work, *Talks on Western Society* (*Xifang shehui mantan* 西方社会漫谈), which chiefly consists of interviews with members of Morning Sun and champions much the same as *Social Ills of the West* but directs its message at China's youth to whom the book is dedicated.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 7–8.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>30</sup> Cities visited include Shanghai, Beijing, Wuxi, Suzhou, and Nanjing. Huilan Yujia (2020a). The two had previously entered the mainland together in 1979. Zhang and Bo (1986: 362).

<sup>31</sup> Huilan Yujia (2020a).

<sup>32</sup> Morning Sun's albums contain tracks such as "The Pursuer of Material Desire's Sick and Worried Heart" (*Wuyu zhuiqiuzhe youxinzhongzhong* 物欲追求者忧心忡忡) and "Gopāla Govinda Rāma" (Gepala Gewenda Wama 戈帕拉·戈文达·哇玛).

<sup>33</sup> Huilan Yujia (2020a).

<sup>34</sup> 35,000 copies were printed in this first run and an additional 10,000 in 1987.

While Butler busied himself with music, Zhang taught yoga throughout the mainland in parks and at universities.<sup>35</sup> In this respect, her proselytization method was identical to that of many *qigong* masters. Yet Zhang's lessons were no doubt tamer than those of some of her counterparts.<sup>36</sup> Zhao Jinxiang's 赵金香 Soaring Crane Technique (Hexiangzhuang 鹤翔庄), for instance, was especially popular in the early 80s, and his method culminated in people acting "spontaneously" in public, "hugging trees, rolling on the ground, crying, burping, or making wild kung fu-style movements."<sup>37</sup> Often, practitioners would even speak in glossolalia (*yuzhou yu* 宇宙语).<sup>38</sup> Not surprising, the government quickly came to disapprove of such unruly displays. Zhang and Butler did too, a fact that could have only improved their standing with the Communist Party.<sup>39</sup>

Eventually, the number of Zhang's students became too great to handle in parks, so she decided, instead, to disseminate her teachings via television.<sup>40</sup> In 1985, her show, *Yujia: ziwo shenxin duanlian fangfa* 瑜伽——自我身心锻炼方法 (*Yoga: Exercise Methods for One's Body and Mind [YEM]*), began airing on China Central Television (CCTV) in thirty-minute segments. Filmed in Honolulu, the program features yoga instruction as well as health and morality talks. The postural practice Zhang models consists mostly of static poses and occasionally makes use of props (e.g., chairs, cushions, ropes, etc.), facts which strongly suggest the influence of B. K. S. Iyengar (1918–2014). Running for fifteen years during a period when government subsidies for television were increasingly reduced and advertisement revenue became CCTV's bread and butter, the show was a success

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<sup>35</sup> Huilan Yujia (2020a). Zhang began teaching to interested individuals in the mainland as early as 1977. Unfortunately, I have been unable to determine the content of her instruction during these initial years.

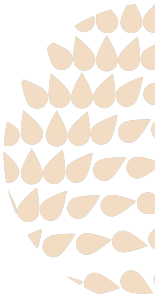
<sup>36</sup> In the mid-1970s, after having allegedly cured herself of cancer, Guo Lin 郭林 (1909–1984) became perhaps the first person to begin offering *qigong* instruction in parks. By the early 1980s, "the use of public spaces for mass *qigong* practice" was commonplace across the country. Guo also lectured on her method at Beijing Normal University (Goossaert and Palmer 2011: 287). See also Palmer (2007: 46–48).

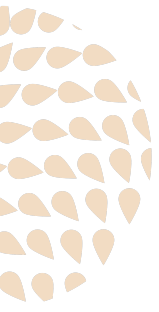
<sup>37</sup> Goossaert and Palmer (2011: 288).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Zhang and Butler acknowledge that yoga can give rise to things like spontaneous jumping, dancing, singing, drooling, coughing, or laughing. However, they also declare that, while "there are sometimes charlatans in public places imitating these symptoms so as to deceive the naïve and unknowing public into believing they are yoga masters...a yoga master possessing true qualifications will normally strive to control these symptoms, not allowing them to show, especially in public" (有时候, 有些骗子在公众场所模仿这些征象, 来欺骗天真无知的公众, 是他们以为自己是瑜伽师...真有真正资格的瑜伽师通常都尽力控制住这些征象, 不让它们露出来, 特别是在公众场合) (Zhang and Bo 1986: 9).

<sup>40</sup> Huilan Yujia (2017).





and, during its tenure, no doubt reached an ever-growing number of people.<sup>41</sup> In 1985, CCTV only had one station. In 1986, it had two, and in 1989, it had three.<sup>42</sup> Viewers were hardly awash with options, even where additional, local broadcasts existed. The number of televisions in China also increased dramatically from one per one hundred people in 1978 to one for every four people in 1996.<sup>43</sup> In cities, ninety-five percent of families already had a television by 1986.<sup>44</sup>

Zhang's efforts were supplemented by two publications—the first works on modern yoga written in Chinese for Chinese: *Yujia: ziwo shenxin duanlian fangfa dianshi jiemu congshu* 瑜伽——自我身心锻炼方法电视节目丛书 (*Yoga: Exercise Methods for One's Body and Mind TV Episode Companion*) and *Yujia: qigong yu mingxiang* 瑜伽——气功与冥想 (*Yoga: Qigong and Meditation [YQM]*).<sup>45</sup> The former was released in three volumes from 1985 to 1988. For the most part, it simply parrots content from the television show and fails to provide a comprehensive overview of yoga. By contrast, YQM offers an extremely thorough, 624-page introduction to yogic thought and practice. Co-authored by Zhang and Butler, the book's discussion of postures (*zishi* 姿式, Skt.: *āsana*), its photographic illustrations of them, and its treatment index are reminiscent of Iyengar's *Light on Yoga*, published exactly twenty years earlier in 1966. However, in addition to offering instruction on *āsana*, breathing techniques (*tiaoxifa* 调息法, Skt.: *prāṇāyāma*), locks (*shoushufa* 收束法, Skt.: *bandha*), and seals (*qihefa* 契合法, Skt.: *mudrā*), YQM delves deeply into the philosophy and practices of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. It also advances the four prohibitions demanded of ISKCON practitioners by Prabhupāda: no illicit sex, no intoxicants, no gambling, and no meat. To help with the latter, it even provides ten vegetarian recipes. Overall, the work might be seen as a somewhat unusual hybrid of what Elizabeth De Michelis refers to as modern psychosomatic and denominational forms of yoga.<sup>46</sup>

YQM's first printing of 39,000 copies sold out at RMB 3.35 a piece. In 1988, an additional 20,000 books were produced. They too flew off the shelves. Since then, hundreds of thousands of copies have been sold and various editions made. Zhang, the face of her

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<sup>41</sup> Hong, Lü, and Zou (2009: 44).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>43</sup> Ying and Berry (2009: 3).

<sup>44</sup> Lull (1991: 23).

<sup>45</sup> Liu, Liu, and Cai (2017: 56).

<sup>46</sup> De Michelis (2004: 187–88).

and Butler's brand, was probably never as popular as some of the PRC's best-known *qigong* masters. Unlike Yan Xin 严新 (b. 1950), she might have had trouble filling up stadiums of twenty thousand people.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, her accomplishments were remarkable. In the closing decades of the twentieth century, she was, without a doubt, China's most famous purveyor of yoga. In the following sections, I provide a few of the reasons for this success.

### Familiar and Familial: "Eastern" Healing From the West

The Chinese People all believe bodily health is extremely precious. [They] also think inner peace and happiness and noble, spiritual qualities are worth more than treasure. It is for precisely this reason I am led to believe that the people of my ancestral homeland will find value in the ancient science of yoga.<sup>48</sup>

These opening lines of YQM are indicative of the way in which Zhang and Butler present their yoga. The practice should be undertaken because it has the power to treat illness, maintain health, and improve one's moral quality.

As with *qigong*, most people probably began flirting with yoga due to health concerns. During the 1980s, free medical care in the countryside was vanishing, and companies providing good insurance in urban centres were becoming rare.<sup>49</sup> The onus was increasingly on individuals to look after themselves. At the same time, China's economic reforms were bringing with them a host of new health issues commonly associated with the modern world (i.e., diseases of affluence).<sup>50</sup>

Under these circumstances, Zhang and Butler claimed to offer something for everyone—"men, women, the old, the young, manual workers, intellectuals, athletes, artists."<sup>51</sup> Even the poor could benefit given yoga's cost-effectiveness. Specific poses and meditative practices were recommended based on occupation. Farmers, for example,

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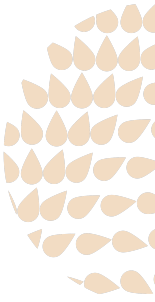
<sup>47</sup> Goossaert and Palmer (2011: 288).

<sup>48</sup> "中国人民都认为身体健康非常宝贵，也认为内心和平幸福与高尚精神品质胜于珍宝。正是这个原因使我相信祖国人民会认识历史悠久的瑜伽科学的价值。" Zhang and Bo (1986: 1).

<sup>49</sup> Milcent (2018: 38–40). The numerous migrant workers flooding cities and taking up menial jobs had particular difficulty financing their healthcare needs. See *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>50</sup> Cook and Dummer (2004: 335–338).

<sup>51</sup> "男女老幼，体力劳动者或脑力劳动者，运动员或艺术家" (Zhang and Bo 1986: 4).





could gain by performing plow pose (*li shi* 犁式, Skt.: *halāsana*), camel pose (*luotuo shi* 骆驼式, Skt.: *uṣṭrāsana*), and extended triangle (*sanjiao shenzhan shi* 三角伸展式, Skt.: *utthita trikoṇāsana*) while those in high-intensity positions (*jinzhang de gongzuo* 紧张的工作) could benefit from things like neck exercises and *mantra* meditation (*yujia yuyin mingxiang* 瑜伽语音冥想).<sup>52</sup>

Yoga could also help with particular ailments. Doing sun salutations (*xiang taiyang zhijing shi* 向太阳致敬式, Skt.: *sūrya namaskāra*) could assist with a cough and cold; yogic sleep (*yujia xiuxishu* 瑜伽休息术, Skt.: *yoganidrā*) and *mantra* meditation were good for cancer patients; headstands (*tou daoli shi* 头倒立式, Skt.: *sālamba śīrṣāsana*) and *prāṇāyāmic* techniques could benefit those with epilepsy; and yogic fasting (*yujia duanshifa* 瑜伽断食法) could improve infections. Psychological issues were similarly treated. Boat pose (*chuan shi* 船式, Skt.: *naukāsana*) was able to alleviate stress, and “holy light” breathing (*shengguang tiaoxi* 圣光调息, Skt.: *kapālabhāti prāṇāyāma*) could dispel anger.

While Zhang and Butler do warn that immediate results are unlikely and advise against viewing yoga as a panacea, they never fail, on television or in their publications, to highlight yoga’s wide-ranging health benefits. They also link the wellbeing of individuals to that of society, stressing the desirable impact yoga can have on a nation’s economy and health care system as well as its ability to raise a country’s moral standing.

Anthropologist Gareth Fisher observes that, in post-Mao China, many individuals were experiencing “moral breakdowns,” the result of “radical ruptures to their identities and social roles” brought on by the abrupt shift from Maoism to a market-based economy.<sup>53</sup> No doubt, many such people would have found Zhang and Butler’s essays and lectures denouncing hedonism and praising socialist values reassuring as they watched Chinese society become more materialistic and corrupt. An explicit connection is even made in YQM between socialists who labour for the collective good and those who selflessly perform karma yoga (*shijian yujia* 实践瑜伽).<sup>54</sup> Yet, this moral dimension would not

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 14–19. On television, the suffix “gong 功” is used far more often than “shi 式.”

<sup>53</sup> Fisher (2014: 3). Fisher begins his fieldwork in 2001, but the “moral breakdowns” he observes were occurring prior to this date.

<sup>54</sup> Zhang and Bo (1986: 585).

have set Zhang and Butler apart from their *qigong*-peddling peers, many of whom were presenting their practices in a similar light.<sup>55</sup>

It was also not the only resemblance between yoga and *qigong*. Chinese healing and cultivation practices share a number of similarities with yoga. Many of the subjects discussed in *YQM*—poses, breathing techniques, hygiene, meditation, *mudrās*, and mantra recitation—have precedents in China long before the 1980s. The *Zhuangzi* 庄子, written and compiled during the Warring States period (476–221 BCE), mentions at least two “guiding and pulling” (*daoyin* 导引) techniques, which, like many yoga *āsanas*, imitate animals: “bear-hangings” (*xiongjing* 熊经) and “bird-stretchings” (*niaoshen* 鸟申).<sup>56</sup> Hua Tuo’s 华佗 Five Animals’ Frolic (*Wuqin xi* 五禽戏), first noted in the third-century text *Sanguo zhi* 三国志 (*Records of the Three Kingdoms*), also brings to mind certain yoga postures.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, the *Xing qi* 行气 (*Cultivating Breath*), a rhyming, forty-five-character inscription dating back to the late fourth century BCE evidences just one of many early breathing practices akin to *prāṇāyāma*.<sup>58</sup> The “sleep exercises” (*shuigong* 睡功) associated with Chen Tuan 陈抟 (d. 989), too, could be compared to *yoganidrā* (yogic sleep).<sup>59</sup>

Historically, the Indian subcontinent has had a tremendous influence on China. The impact of South and Central Asian Buddhists, who began their “conquest” of the Sinic civilization during the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), was especially potent, including in the area of medicine.<sup>60</sup> A particular Tang dynasty (618–907 CE) text, the *Shesheng zuanlu* 摄生纂录 (*Comprehensive Record for Protecting Life*) even speaks of something

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<sup>55</sup> Goossaert and Palmer (2011: 289).

<sup>56</sup> Watson (1968: 168). There is also the instance of Hong Meng 鸿蒙 “slapping his thighs and hopping around like a sparrow” (*fubi queyue* 拊髀雀跃). *Ibid.*, 121. Thomas Michael suggests that the sparrow-hopping is an example of *daoyin* and that Hong Meng’s thigh-slapping is “a kind of *qi*-massage that serves to assist the flow of *qi* throughout the body” (Michael 2015: 147). Although Michael certainly seems convinced, Hong Meng’s actions might just be those of a madman. The *Zhuangzi* contains many characters who appear at once insightful and insane—saying and doing the nonsensical and often acting with total disregard for social norms. When asked what he is doing, Hong Meng responds, “I am amusing myself,” not “I am cultivating myself” (Watson 1968: 121).

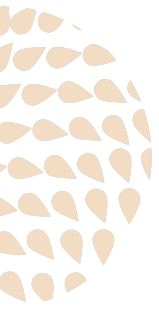
<sup>57</sup> The first texts to describe the Five Animals’ Frolic only appear in the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE). For a history of the sequence’s development, see Kohn (2008: 163–69).

<sup>58</sup> For a brief discussion of this inscription, see Harper (1998: 125–26).

<sup>59</sup> For information on *shuigong*, see Kohn (2008: 184–89).

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Fan Ka-Wai’s discussion of certain Indian medicines, massages, and surgeries being recognized or even adopted in China during the Sui (581–618 CE) and Tang (618–907 CE) dynasties





called “Brahmanic gymnastics” (*poluomen daoyin fa* 婆罗门导引法).<sup>61</sup> Yet, despite this influence, many of the practices introduced to China in the 1980s by Zhang and Butler were, in fact, new, only having been devised in India during the late colonial period.<sup>62</sup> As Joseph S. Alter demonstrates, “a significant percentage of what counts for yoga today” is absent from the *hathayoga* literature.<sup>63</sup> Postural practice in particular underwent immense transformation. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, various novel poses and sequences emerged as “hybridized product[s]” via the dialogical interactions which occurred between bodybuilding and harmonial gymnastics from the West, on the one hand, and Hindu revitalization and reformation movements, on the other.<sup>64</sup> It must be noted, however, that, broadly speaking, yoga was changed through its encounter with modernity and imperialist powers in much the same way as Chinese practices were, and this has, if anything, deepened their resemblance even as it has produced new forms within their respective traditions.<sup>65</sup>

Ontologically, of course, rationalized forms of yoga are not the same as those of *qigong* or any other Chinese system for that matter. Although a particular posture or movement may look identical whether performed by a yogi or a *qigong* master, the way in which it is meant to be utilized, experienced, and understood is unlikely to be the same. That said, it is entirely possible for an individual to conflate two or more traditions. And confusing yoga with *qigong* in 1980s China certainly happened. In fact, at times, it was encouraged.

While Zhang and Butler do draw attention to yoga’s universal nature, calling it, for instance, “the whole world’s and all of humanity’s treasure,” they also emphasize yoga’s “Easternness” and likeness to Chinese cultivation practices.<sup>66</sup> The subtitle of YQM

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(Fan 2013: 77, 89, and 96). The transmission of Indian medicine was less successful at the theoretical level (Unschuld 2010 [1985]: 141 and 150).

<sup>61</sup> Despeux (1989: 231).

<sup>62</sup> New for the vast majority of Chinese, that is. Indeed, forms of modern yoga were taught to small numbers of people prior to Zhang’s mission. Indra Devi (1899–2002), a student of Krishnamacharya (1888–1989 CE), for instance, taught her postural practice in Shanghai during the 1940s. See Goldberg (2015: 133–36).

<sup>63</sup> Alter (2004: 23).

<sup>64</sup> Singleton (2010: 81).

<sup>65</sup> Some of these parallel processes are explored in van der Veer (2014: 168–92).

<sup>66</sup> “全世界——全人类的财富。” Zhang and Bo 1986, 2. An almost identical statement is made in Huilan Yujia (2020b: episode 1).

actually suggests that yoga is a type of *qigong*.<sup>67</sup> Elsewhere in the book, Zhang and Butler call *qigong* “Chinese yoga” (*Zhongguo yujia* 中国瑜伽), further conflating the two.<sup>68</sup> In using Chinese medical terms like *jingluo* 经络 (meridian) to denote the channels (*nāḍī*) of the yogic body and words like *qi* 气 (breath) to refer to *prāṇa* (breath), they do much the same.<sup>69</sup> Through translation, yoga acquires a distinct, local flavour.

Zhang and Butler call “the connection [between yoga and *qigong*] important, ancient, and long lasting” and suggest that the “two systems...have many methods of practice that are, in essence, not very different.”<sup>70</sup> They argue that “there already exists many Chinese-style yoga methods for improving and controlling *prāṇa*” and that yoga and *qigong* are alike in viewing problems with the body’s *qi* as a major source of illness.<sup>71</sup> Yoga and Chinese traditions are also “almost identical” in the way they conceive of the body’s subtle channels.<sup>72</sup> Given these similarities, one can do yoga and Chinese exercises in tandem. Zhang and Butler even admit to “practising a little *taijiquan*” themselves.<sup>73</sup> In fact, they call on their audience to “take Chinese *qigong* and Indian yoga and smelt them together in a single furnace.”<sup>74</sup> Individuals “who already practise a form of Chinese yoga...[should] not mistakenly think that, if they practise [Indian yoga], they must quit

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<sup>67</sup> Zhang’s pre-YQM essays published in the “*Qigong* in Foreign Countries” (*Qigong zai guowai* 气功在国外) section of *Qigong Magazine* (*Qigong zazhi* 气功杂志) imply much the same. See, for instance, Zhang (1984). In episodes of *YEM*, the term *yujiaogong* 瑜伽功 (yoga gong) is also used frequently. Many Chinese called yoga “foreign *qigong*” (*waiguo qigong* 外国气功) or “Indian *qigong*” (*Yindu qigong* 印度气功), but Zhang and Butler avoid these terms.

<sup>68</sup> Zhang and Bo (1986: 7).

<sup>69</sup> It is perhaps of interest to the reader that Zhang and Butler almost always choose to translate “corpse pose” (Skt.: *śavāsana*) as “method for resting supine” (*yangwo fangsong gong* 仰卧放松功). This choice was no doubt made in consideration of Chinese taboos surrounding death and dying. One is certainly reminded of the proscription against lying like a corpse (*qin bu shi* 寝不尸) found in the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 论语).

<sup>70</sup> “两者的关系是重要而极为古老悠久的。” Zhang and Bo 1986, 2. “两种瑜伽体系[即中国和印度的]有许多练习方法其实并没有什么本质上的不同。” *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>71</sup> “已经有好几种提升和控制生命之气的中国式瑜伽功法存在了。” *Ibid.*, 8. The claim that yoga and *qigong* possess similar medical understandings is made in Huilan Yujia (2020b: episode 1). In other instances, the term “Eastern medicine” is used to envelop the two systems. *Ibid.*, episode 13.

<sup>72</sup> “几乎完全等同。” Zhang and Bo (1986: 391).

<sup>73</sup> “练了一点太极拳。” *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>74</sup> “把中国气功和印度瑜伽共治一炉。” *Ibid.*





their existing practice.”<sup>75</sup> “On the contrary, they can use their discretion to take beneficial techniques [from yoga] and incorporate them into their routine.”<sup>76</sup> In doing so, “there is no contradiction [and] there will be no harm.”<sup>77</sup> Since, in China, being exclusive in one’s practice is literally a foreign concept which vexes only those adherents of Abrahamic faiths, the notion of mixing yoga with *qigong* would, for most Chinese, hardly have been controversial.<sup>78</sup>

These observations are very different from what academics like Véronique Altglas have encountered while investigating yoga’s spread to Western nations. In Europe and the Americas, yoga has been exoticized, clandestinely made palatable, and adopted through a kind of neoliberal bricolage.<sup>79</sup> Zhang and Butler, though, highlight similarities rather than differences, and their audience’s selective embrace of yoga alongside other practices was nothing new or exciting, neither modern nor rebellious; it was decidedly typical, the way things had always been done.

But why *not* present yoga as exotic? Would doing so not have made it more attractive? One reason for focusing on the similarities between *qigong* and yoga might have been to make the latter more accessible. Another reason, though, is political. In the 1980s, there was a spike in nationalist fervor. In the aftershock of Maoism’s great disappointment, nationalism acted as a lifebuoy. And at the time, integral to the reimagination of the PRC was *qigong*. Actively promoted by leading scientists and high-ranking government officials, including members of the twelfth and thirteenth Politburo Standing Committees (1982–1987 and 1987–1992), *qigong* was considered “a Chinese cultural treasure,” even “the source of Chinese civilization.”<sup>80</sup> Many believed it would “trigger a

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<sup>75</sup> “已经练习了某种形式中国瑜伽...不要以为为了开始练本书中某种功法就得放弃他们现在正练着的某种体系。” Ibid., 8.

<sup>76</sup> “相反，他们还可以采用感到对自己有益处的那些功法，并编配到自己的锻炼内容中去。” Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> “没有什么矛盾的，不会有什么害处的。” Ibid., 7.

<sup>78</sup> Religious professionals aside, Chinese have long been noncommittal, moving freely among temples and between gods and bodhisattvas in search of the power (*ling* 灵) necessary to grant them their wants and needs. See Hansen 1990. Intellectual forms of eclecticism also have a long history. By the fourth century CE, China already had its very own “Alan Watts” in the form of Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–343). See Sivin (1978: 326).

<sup>79</sup> Altglas (2014).

<sup>80</sup> Palmer (2007: 82–84, 57, and 109).

new scientific revolution” and would “allow China to recover its place as a leader among world nations.”<sup>81</sup> “To attack *qigong* was to attack all of Chinese society.”<sup>82</sup>

It is perhaps no wonder that Zhang and Butler dedicated YQM to “the people of the great and magnificent Chinese nation.”<sup>83</sup> In any case, placing yoga in opposition to *qigong* or demanding exclusivity were obviously not options. Doing so could very well have turned Butler into an enemy and made Zhang a traitor to her own people.

It should also not escape our attention that being Indian or “Eastern” improved yoga’s political standing in the country. From its conception, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has seen itself as leading “the East” (or developing South) against “the West” (or industrialized North) and, since coming to power in 1949, has ceaselessly employed this bifurcation for purposes of stoking nationalism, defining “Chineseness,” and disciplining its subjects.<sup>84</sup> Fortunately for yoga, being “Eastern” also meant being on the right side of this divide.

That said, Zhang and Butler’s brand, even while underscoring its connection to China, is not entirely devoid of Western content—and in it are these elements, rather than anything Indian, which might have appeared exotic to their Chinese audience. The Western influence on yoga itself would have been undetectable to most. Yet Zhang’s makeup, brightly coloured clothes, and flower leis—truly the antithesis of Mao-era fashion—no doubt would have turned heads. She appeared, in many ways, the very embodiment of China’s opening up and reform. Her television show, too, filmed out of doors in Hawaii, provided her audience glimpses of beautiful American landscapes. Cutscenes during monologues also offered snippets of Western homes, restaurants, and offices. Implied, somewhat paradoxically, in Zhang and Butler’s work is the notion that to be like the modern West one ought to practice yoga.

In addition to Zhang herself—her charisma; her soft, confident tone; her physical beauty; and less-than-holy beginnings—it is perhaps her link to the West that would have set her apart from the many *qigong* masters of her day. It certainly would have done a lot more to make her conspicuous than a few novel *mantras* and *mudrās*. Yet, as

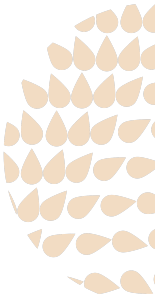
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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>83</sup> “这个伟大，壮丽国家的全体中国人民” (Zhang and Bo 1986: xiii).

<sup>84</sup> Chen (1995: 5 and 39).



we will see in the following section, Zhang and Butler, despite all of this, employed an overtly anti-Western rhetoric.

### Hedonism and “Science”

The idea that the developed world is plagued by hedonism is not limited to *Social Ills of the West* and *Talks on Western Society*. It is present in all of Zhang and Butler’s work and immediately reminds one of Swami Vivekananda’s (1863–1902) habit of materializing “the West” and spiritualizing “the East.” Never once bringing up China’s own infamous hedonist, Yang Zhu 杨朱 (4th c. BCE), Zhang and Butler complain that too many Westerners mistakenly identify with the body. Even worse, they believe freedom is a state of surrendering to the senses. “Such people are no more than dogs” endlessly chasing gratification.<sup>85</sup> In taking aim at the West, however, Zhang and Butler are quick to note that one should not cease consuming and contributing to China’s economic growth. In no way do they force their audience to choose between Bernard Mandeville’s “spacious hive” and “hollow tree.”<sup>86</sup> “Economic development,” they declare, “is a must.”<sup>87</sup>

Zhang’s morality talks on *YEM* draw attention to things like junk-food diets and sexual promiscuity. She points to the diseases and economic issues these practices can bring, and, in one episode, even suggests that HIV might spread wildly and destroy the Western world.<sup>88</sup> Perhaps, most appalling to Chinese ears, though, so tuned to the discourses of filial piety (*xiaoshun* 孝顺), would have been the assertion that hedonism causes individuals “to no longer have any interest in being sons and daughters who lovingly care for their parents and grandparents.”<sup>89</sup>

Such rhetoric helps explain why the state was so tolerant of Zhang and Butler’s yoga-spreading mission. Butler in particular—a white American wilfully denouncing his homeland—was a propagandist’s dream. Until 1989, there was a faction within the CCP which, to some extent, still romanticized the West. However, it was by far the weaker camp. The fact that starry-eyed depictions of the developed world, such as *River Elegy*

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<sup>85</sup> “这样的人只不过是一条狗罢了” (Zhang and Bo 1986: 581). Also see Huilan Yujia (2020b: episode 24).

<sup>86</sup> Mandeville (1806 [1714]: 1 and 11).

<sup>87</sup> “经济发展显然是有必要的。” Bo and Zhang (1983: 597).

<sup>88</sup> Huilan Yujia (2020b: episode 24). For talk of junk food, see *Ibid.*, episodes 9 and 27.

<sup>89</sup> “做儿女的对关心爱护父母或者长辈也不再感兴趣了。” *Ibid.*, episode 39.

(*Heshang* 河殇), reached the masses at all in the 1980s was “almost accidental.”<sup>90</sup> Without a doubt, the majority of China’s leadership would have supported Zhang and Butler’s efforts to defame the West. The fact that YEM indirectly received state subsidies and aired for fifteen years on CCTV, the most strictly censored network in the country and a well-known mouthpiece of the Communist Party, certainly implies as much.<sup>91</sup>

Although it definitely wished to cast the West in a negative light, the Dengist regime did recognize that the developed world had something of value—science, which China desperately needed if it wished to achieve its Four Modernizations. Chen Xiaomei calls Deng “a master in annexing the Occident.”<sup>92</sup> He snatched up “Western science and technology for his economic reform while wholly rejecting Western political and legal systems.”<sup>93</sup> Notably, *Social Ills of the West* opens with a song lyric echoing precisely this sentiment:

take the best  
leave the bad  
choose only that which you need  
like a honeybee extracting nectar<sup>94</sup>

Succulent hegemon as it was, no doubt many readers would have been quick to construe “nectar” as science. Its status also makes it easy to see why Zhang and Butler make use of scientific facts, terms, and figures to bolster yoga’s legitimacy. Their written materials are peppered with references to leading biomedical journals and

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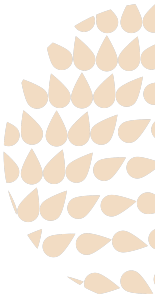
<sup>90</sup> Chen (1995: 43). *River Elegy* is a six-part documentary series that vilifies traditional Chinese culture and glorifies the West. It first aired on CCTV in 1988 and played a role in bringing about the following year’s protests. See Gunn (1991: 21–22).

<sup>91</sup> Lull (1991: 26). Hong et al. argue that CCTV serving in this capacity has remained unaltered since its conception. See Hong, Lü, and Zou (2009: 47 and 52–53). I have encountered one case of Zhang critiquing Chinese society. However, the issue raised was that of corruption, a topic relatively safe to discuss during the 1980s so long as one’s finger did not point too high. Even in this instance, though, Zhang locates the root of the problem in the infectious hedonism which her and Butler so commonly associate with the West. See Huilan Yujia (2020b: episode 39).

<sup>92</sup> Chen (1995: 43).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> “取其精华，去其糟粕。只选取您所需要的，就象蜜蜂采花蜜” (Bo and Zhang 1983: 9). *Talks on Western Society* concludes with the same lyric. See Zhang (1985: 214). The lyric itself appears to come from a song Butler performed during his 1980 tour of the PRC called “Take the Best, Leave the Bad” (*Qu qi jinghua, qu qi zaopo* 取其精华，去其糟粕) (Huilan Yujia 2020a).





scientific institutions. They even cite famous figures like Albert Einstein (1879–1955) as “gasping in amazement” when confronted with the wisdom of ancient yogic treatises.<sup>95</sup> Yet, they also speak of yoga as a science in its own right.<sup>96</sup> Such an assertion certainly brings to mind efforts within *qigong* circles to elevate the Chinese system to the level of “super-science.”<sup>97</sup> However, Zhang and Butler’s tactics should not be thought of as mimetic of *qigong*. For decades, Indians and Westerners had sought to secularize and scientize yoga in much the same way as Chinese had sought to secularize and scientize their own health and healing traditions. Already in the nineteenth century, Vivekananda was employing the language of science to justify yoga, and, in the early 1900s, individuals like Swami Kavalayananda (1883–1966) were “systematically ‘confus[ing]’ *prāṇa* and oxygen, nerves and *nāḍīs*, organs and *cakras*.”<sup>98</sup> More importantly, Prabhupāda had proclaimed his tradition a science worthy of replacing its Western counterpart.<sup>99</sup> Inheriting this discourse and “confusion” served the two yogis well. It made them politically correct in the PRC, lent their practice an air of validity, and allowed them to integrate seamlessly into the *qigong* scene.

But as “scientists,” were they not also Vaiṣṇavaitees? What of the religious dimensions of their yoga?

### Subduing the Religious

Zhang and Butler are Vaiṣṇavaitees. They are religious, and so is their yoga.<sup>100</sup> Such statements will seem obvious to anyone who has had even a cursory glance at Butler’s English-language publications from the period.<sup>101</sup> Yet, in what appears to be nothing less than an attempt to covertly spread Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism in the People’s Republic of China, Zhang and Butler have greatly subdued in their Chinese works many elements which might be readily associated with religion. This is especially the case with *YEM* but

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<sup>95</sup> “惊异赞叹” (Zhang and Bo 1986: 1).

<sup>96</sup> Yoga is referred to as a science in both the very first episode of *YEM* and on the opening page of *YQM*.

<sup>97</sup> Palmer (2007: 120).

<sup>98</sup> De Michelis (2004: 156); Alter (2004: 105–6).

<sup>99</sup> For a discussion of the various ways Prabhupāda and other ISKCON leaders employ the term “science,” see Zeller (2010: 69–113).

<sup>100</sup> Religion is, of course, a contested category. Zhang and Butler’s Vaiṣṇavism, though, easily meets the criteria of most definitions.

<sup>101</sup> See, for instance, Butler (1982); Butler (1987 [1983]).

is true of their written materials as well. Scriptures such as the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and the *Bhagavadgītā* are praised, even quoted. But Kṛṣṇa's miraculous exploits in the former and his transfiguration in the latter are notably absent. Often, too, the names of gods and goddesses are presented esoterically. Let us take *mantra* meditation as an example since it is the practice *par excellence* of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavaitees and praised by Zhang and Butler as “the most complete, popular, and tried and true yoga meditation technique.”<sup>102</sup> YQM recommends and discusses the following six mantras:

1. *Omu* 噢姆
2. *Omu Harui Omu* 噢姆-哈瑞-噢姆
3. Haliboer Nitai-Ge'er 哈里波尔-尼太-戈尔
4. Madanna Mohanna 玛丹那-莫汉那
5. Madanna-Mohanna Muwali Haruiboer 玛丹那-莫汉那-木哇利-哈瑞波尔
6. Gepala Gewenda Wama Madanna-Mohanna 戈帕拉-戈文达-哇玛-玛丹那-莫汉那<sup>103</sup>

The second *mantra* consistently appears on Zhang's television show. It begins and ends with the first *mantra*, “*Omu*,” a somewhat awkward rendering of the Sanskrit “*Om*.” This, however, is not the way in which *Om* is usually transliterated into Chinese. In the vast majority of Buddhist texts, for instance, the character *an* 唵 is used. It might be the case that Zhang and Butler were simply trying to better capture the Sanskrit sound, although it is equally possible that they were attempting to create distance from Buddhism. After all, tying themselves to a recognized faith would have greatly complicated their mission, even sabotaged it. To be a science was infinitely better than being a religion.<sup>104</sup> In addition, there appears to be sectarian reasons for their choice. Early on in YQM, Zhang and Butler explicitly state that yoga is not Buddhism. Any similarities, they claim, are the result of “Buddhists absorbing multiple forms of yogic practice and incorporating them into their own systems.”<sup>105</sup> As a result, “the majority

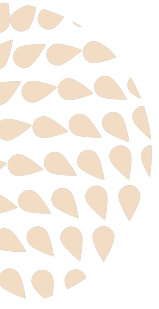
<sup>102</sup> For Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavaitees, chanting the names of Kṛṣṇa is believed to be the only effective method for achieving liberation during the *kaliyuga* (the present and worst age in a cycle of four). “瑜伽冥想术中最完全、最流行、最久经时间考验的一种” (Zhang and Bo 1986: 6). Elsewhere, Zhang and Butler refer to it as the “most advanced and easiest yoga mediation method” (最高级和简易的瑜伽冥想方法). *Ibid.*, 526. Zhang even goes so far as to suggest it should be learned prior to taking up any other yoga practice (*gongfa* 功法) (Zhang 1985–1988: 3, 6).

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 523–28. Notably lacking is the *mahāmantra* so inextricably linked to the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement and, more generally, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. Perhaps, even in the PRC, it was simply too recognizable.

<sup>104</sup> Ute Engelhardt notes that, prior to the 1990s, “it was considered wrong to point out the Daoist or Buddhist precursors of certain exercises” within the *qigong* milieu (Engelhardt 2000: 84).

<sup>105</sup> “佛教徒们把许多种瑜伽修炼方法吸收、柔和到自己的体系中去” (Zhang and Bo 1986: 9).





of Buddhist systems make use of yogic cultivation methods, but the majority of the world's yogis do not practice Buddhism.”<sup>106</sup> Elsewhere, they attack the Buddhist ideal of *nirvāṇa* (*jimielun* 寂灭论) and the doctrine of *no-self* (*wuwo* 无我, Skt.: *anātman*).<sup>107</sup> In still other places, they belittle the practice of “returning to emptiness” (*gui yu xuwu* 归于虚无), criticizing its proponents for not recognizing that “emptiness is, in fact, not empty at all...but full of spiritual substance, spiritual form, spiritual love, and spiritual motion.”<sup>108</sup> Ultimate realization comes only when one experiences the state described by Caitanya as “oneness and difference existing simultaneously” (*yizhixing yu chabiexing tongshi bingcun* 一致性与差别性同时并存, Skt.: *acintyabhedābheda*).<sup>109</sup>

The second *mantra* listed above also contains the word “Harui” (Skt.: Hare), which is commonly believed to denote either the god Viṣṇu or else Kṛṣṇa’s consort Rādhā.<sup>110</sup> Yet, Zhang and Butler do not make this connection. In fact, they provide no explanation for the term whatsoever. The same word appears in the third *mantra* but as “Hali.” Here, the authors suggest the word’s “hidden meaning” (*hanyi* 含义) is simply “magnificence” (*zhuangmei* 壮美) or “attractiveness” (*xiyin* 吸引).<sup>111</sup> “*Nitai*” (Skt.: *nitya*) and “*ge’er*” (Skt.: *gaura*) are technically correct being glossed as “eternal” (*yongheng* 永恒) and “golden in colour” (*jinse de* 金色的).<sup>112</sup> Only in a footnote, do they point to the fact that “*Nitai-Ge’er*” is conventionally understood as pointing to Śrī Nityānānda Prabhu (b. 1474) and Caitanya.<sup>113</sup> Even here, though, Zhang and Butler fail to mention that Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavaitees believe these two figures to be incarnations of Balarāma and Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa respectively.

The fourth *mantra*, “Madanna Mohanna” (Skt.: Madanamohana), is a name for Kṛṣṇa, which means something like “confounder of Kāma,” Kāma being the god of sexual love.

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<sup>106</sup> “大多数佛教的体系都利用瑜伽修炼方法，但是，世界上大多数瑜伽士都不修佛。” Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 547–48; Bo and Zhang (1983: 386–87).

<sup>108</sup> Zhang and Bo (1986: 545). “‘虚无’，其实一点也不‘虚无’的...却是充满精神实质、精神形体、精神的爱和精神活动的” Ibid., 546.

<sup>109</sup> My translation seeks to reflect the Chinese rather than the Sanskrit, which would be better rendered as something like “inconceivable difference and non-difference.”

<sup>110</sup> This variability results from Hare being both the vocative form of Hari and Harā. Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavaitees tend to favour the latter interpretation.

<sup>111</sup> Zhang and Bo (1986: 526).

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. A similar explanation can be found in Zhang (1985: 66).

<sup>113</sup> Zhang and Bo (1986: 526).

Once again, Zhang and Butler are less than forthcoming. Similarly, in the fifth *mantra*, “Muwali” (Skt.: Murāri), a name for Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa meaning “slayer of Mura” is left unexplained. Instead, the entire *mantra* is simply said to be “spiritual love, truth, goodness, and beauty, as well as the aural representation of these four qualities which the human heart finds attractive.”<sup>114</sup>

The final *mantra*, like the second through fifth, also includes names or epithets of deities. “Gepala” (Skt.: Gopāla) and “Gewenda” (Skt.: Govinda) both mean something like “cowherd” and refer to Kṛṣṇa. And “Wama”—normally written Luomo 罗摩—denotes Rāma. Once again, none of this is communicated to the reader.

It is worth noting that such reticence is absent from Butler’s English-language publications, which explicitly make the connection between God and the aforementioned terms.<sup>115</sup> This being the case, Zhang and Butler’s decision to subdue the religious while missionizing in China appears to have been made in consideration of local politics. It is perhaps not surprising then that, as masked as the meanings are in YQM, when *mantras* appear on television—a far more politically sensitive medium—they are even less decipherable. Although each and every episode begins and ends with musical renditions of either the second or third *mantra*, the words are never explained. The same is true when Zhang teaches *mantra* meditation. Doubly disguised by her pronunciation and their transliteration into Chinese, during such lessons, even someone with a background in Sanskrit might be left guessing at what the sounds signify. Zhang and Butler’s willingness to be less than transparent in the PRC can be explained by the fact that the two yogis understood these *mantras* to have inherent power. “God’s Name has power whether you think it has power or not,” claims Butler.<sup>116</sup> “It’s not just a mirror that’s reflecting the belief of the chanter...All you need to do is chant it and the effect will be there.”<sup>117</sup> At the same time, YEM viewers’ willingness not to know the *mantras*’ meanings likely has something to do with the fact that reciting the unintelligible as if a magic spell has long been commonplace across East Asia.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> “精神之爱、真、善、美以及这四者吸引人心的性质的语音代表。” Ibid., 528. See also Zhang (1985: 66).

<sup>115</sup> See, for instance, Butler (1982: 24–25).

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> See, for example, Paul Copp’s work on *dhāraṇīs* in the context of medieval Chinese Buddhism (Copp 2014: 4).





Notwithstanding Zhang and Butler's efforts to downplay the religious and position their yoga as a science, it is probably still best to think of their brand as belonging to what Yang Fenggang refers to as the "grey market" of religion in China. According to Yang, the PRC's religious landscape can be divided into red, grey, and black markets. The former includes the legal activities of registered bodies and believers belonging to one of the country's five official religions: Buddhism, Daoism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam. This "open market is stained 'red,'...colored with the official Communist ideology" and, significantly, does not include Hinduism.<sup>119</sup> The black market refers to all groups and activities explicitly banned in the country and the grey market to "all religious and spiritual organizations, practitioners, and activities with ambiguous legal status."<sup>120</sup> Yang places in this latter category "various forms of informal or implicit religion and spirituality," including schools of *qigong* and yoga, which "may insist that their practices are culturally or scientifically based."<sup>121</sup> In the next and final section, I offer an explanation for why Zhang and Butler's yoga was able to stay grey even as the *qigong* sector turned black.

### Staying Grey

Throughout the 1990s, *qigong*'s relationship with the Chinese state was strained at the best of times. In many respects, the government had lost control of the movement. *Qigong* was becoming unabashedly religious, and its leaders were increasingly seen as dangerous. On April 25, 1999, after over ten thousand Falun Gong practitioners lined up in protest at China's political center in Beijing, Zhongnanhai 中南海, the state's subsequent move to paint *qigong* black probably felt overdue.<sup>122</sup>

*YEM* stopped airing in 2000, no doubt as part of the ensuing crackdown. Yet, Zhang and Butler managed to retain a presence in the country. After rebranding as Huilan Yoga (Huilan Yujia 蕙兰瑜伽), Zhang released a series of DVD collections between the years 2006 and 2007 as well as a coffee-table book, *The Gift of Yoga* (*Yujia de zengyu* 瑜伽的赠予).<sup>123</sup> In 2010, Zhang and Butler produced three music compilations, and, in 2012,

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<sup>119</sup> Yang (2006: 97).

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 97–98.

<sup>122</sup> For a discussion of this protest, see Penny (2012: 1–3).

<sup>123</sup> The DVD collections are Huilan Yoga Simple and Easy Series (Huilan yujia jianyi xilie 蕙兰瑜伽简易系列), Huilan Yoga Intermediate Series (Huilan yujia zhongji xilie 蕙兰瑜伽中级系列), and Huilan Yoga

published *Huilan Yoga* (*Huilan Yujia* 蕙兰瑜伽) in three volumes.<sup>124</sup> That same year, they also released *Meditation with Melodies for Physical and Spiritual Health* (*Mingxiang youyun xingshen jian* 冥想悠韵形神健), an audiovisual resource for meditative practice. Religious elements remain subdued in this new material—at times, to a greater extent than before.<sup>125</sup> Moreover, “*qigong*” and related terms like “*gongfa* 功法” (method) hardly ever appear.<sup>126</sup> Measures such as these have allowed Zhang and Butler’s yoga to remain grey.

And flourish. The suppression of *qigong* created a vacuum in China that, in recent years, yoga has been quick to fill, leading to a second, vastly larger wave of popularization than occurred in the 80s and 90s. Zhang and Butler’s ability to disassociate themselves from *qigong* in this later period has been to their advantage. Indeed, today, the “mother of yoga” is a celebrated icon and source of national pride.<sup>127</sup> Her content is widely available across the country, especially online where practitioners can hear from Zhang directly via WeChat (Weixin 微信) or Weibo 微博 and can make use of platforms like Youku 优酷, iQiyi (Aiqiyi 爱奇艺), and CCTV to stream her music and videos.

## Conclusion

Zhang and Butler’s yoga was a success in the PRC during the 1980s and 90s precisely because it offered a unique path to health and morality while remaining politically savvy. As medical care became less affordable and the country shifted away from Maoism, it provided a cost-effective treatment and supplied a counterpoint to society’s increasing materialism and corruption.

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International TV Series (*Huilan yujia guoji dianshi xilie* 蕙兰瑜伽国际电视系列). A sequel to *Huilan Yoga Simple and Easy Series* was also released in 2014.

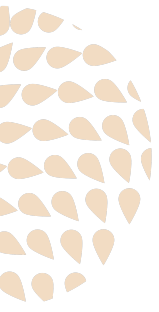
<sup>124</sup> The music compilations are *Sound Meditation Classics Collection* (*Yuyin mingxiang jingdian heji* 语音冥想经典合集), *Huilan Yoga Handpicked Music Collection One* (*Huilan yujia yinyue jingxuan diancang [yi]* 蕙兰瑜伽音乐精选典藏 [一]) and *Huilan Yoga Handpicked Music Collection Two* (*Huilan yujia yinyue jingxuan diancang [er]* 蕙兰瑜伽音乐精选典藏 [二]).

<sup>125</sup> In *Huilan Yoga*, for instance, all references to Zhang and Butler’s spiritual lineage are scrubbed, their Sanskrit names are missing, and the *Bhagavadgītā*, so often quoted in *YQM*, is never once mentioned.

<sup>126</sup> The suffix “*gong* 功” is consistently replaced with safer alternatives like “*shu* 术” (technique) and “*shi* 式” (pose) as well.

<sup>127</sup> Zhang was especially a source of national pride in 2016 when she became the second Chinese national in history to win India’s prestigious Padma Award. See *Times of India* (2016) and *Zhongguo tiyu bao* 中国体育报 (2016).





Politically, Zhang and Butler were accepted because they subdued the religious dimensions of their practice while holding themselves as champions of science and critics of the West. They also emphasized yoga's "Eastern" roots and made efforts to present it as similar to and compatible with *qigong* and Chinese medicine. Yet, when the government's crackdown on psychophysical- and biospiritual-cultivation practices ensued at the turn of the century, their ability to separate their brand from *qigong* and keep veiled its religious nature did much to ensure its survival. As a result, while many forms of *qigong* have, today, long since vanished from the PRC, Zhang and Butler's posture-heavy Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism continues to stretch and sing.

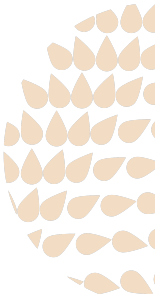
### Acknowledgements

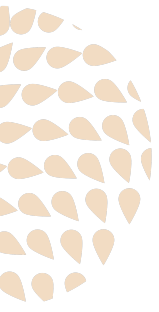
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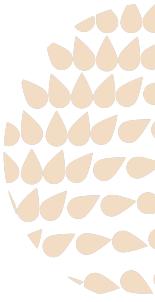
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