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Global Yoga in Eastern Europe. Tracing Cultural Brokers in Socialist Czechoslovakia and Poland

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English abstract: This paper investigates the transmission and institutionalization of modern yoga in socialist Czechoslovakia and Poland between the 1960s and 1980s, analyzing the roles played by “cultural brokers” (B. Hauser) Milada Bartoňová and Tadeusz Pasek. The analysis pursues a dual purpose: firstly, to enrich research on connections between socialist Europe and the Global South, shedding light on hitherto overlooked transmissions of ideas of health and spirituality; secondly, to bridge a gap in yoga studies by turning to the as yet understudied case of state-socialist societies. In so doing, the article reveals the malleability of socialist cultures and their ability to integrate cultural patterns that were seemingly at odds with state-socialist ideology. Through the cases of Bartoňová and Pasek, we illustrate how individual actors both interacted with yoga schools in India and aligned yoga with socialist agendas at home while accommodating the practice’s ideological ambiguities. The paper concludes that biopolitical concerns of preserving workforce productivity in advanced modernity fostered the popularity of psychophysical practices such as yoga in societies of both the Western and Eastern blocs, thus exemplifying modern yoga’s adaptability to diverse normative frameworks.

The Prague Spring was a pivotal moment in the history of socialist Czechoslovakia. For many Czechs and Slovaks, the turbulent events of 1968 resulted in a rollercoaster of emotions: reforms emanating from the party brought long-desired liberties and sprouted hopes of democratization, all of which were brutally crushed by the invasion of the Warsaw Pact troops. The Czech publishing house employee Milada Bartoňová, however, experienced 1968 in a radically different way: She spent most of the year in Munger, a town in northeastern India, where the guru Swami Satyananda Saraswati ran a famous yoga school. Bartoňová studied intensively the amalgam of physical practices, meditation and breathing techniques that constitutes modern 20th-century yoga. While in her home country the drama of the Prague Spring was unfolding, Bartoňová strived for body control and suppleness in the spirit of *Hatha Yoga*, sensed the life energy *prāṇa* through her breath, and immersed herself in canonical Hindu texts such as the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Upaniṣads*. When she returned to Czechoslovakia (where the invasion was soon followed by a repressive communist restoration), she brought yoga with her and became a key figure not only for spreading the practice in subcultural circles, but also for integrating it into institutions of the socialist state.

As both a mental and an embodied practice, modern yoga straddles spirituality and sport, therapy and philosophy. Since this polyvalence emerged from multiple interactions between South Asia and the Euro-American world, modern yoga is well-suited for case studies of transnational contacts and entanglements, which were linked to ideas of physical and mental health, personal growth, and salvation. This article examines how ideas and practices of modern yoga were transferred and institutionalized in socialist Czechoslovakia and Poland. It traces the activities of Milada Bartoňová in Czechoslovakia and compares them to those of Tadeusz Pasek, a yoga popularizer who played a comparable role in the People's Republic of Poland.

The objective of our analysis is twofold: firstly, we aim to contribute to ongoing research on the links between socialist Europe and the Global South. While recent scholarship in this field has cast a more global view of Cold-War Eastern Europe extending beyond the binary East-West perspective, little attention has been paid to the transmission of teachings and ideas related to health and spirituality.¹ In this context, the example of yoga highlights the plasticity of state-socialist culture and its ability to integrate cultural patterns that were seemingly at odds with state-socialist ideology. Secondly, the article addresses a gap in historical yoga studies, which have rarely looked at state-socialist

1 These works question, from a postcolonial perspective, the overdetermination of Cold-War history by American and Soviet spheres of influence. Instead, they insert a global historical framework that no longer views Eastern Europe as a Soviet proxy and liberates the Global South from the status of a mere historical arena of the superpower conflict. This scholarship demonstrates how Eastern Europe's relations with Asian, African, and Latin American countries shaped the region's self-understanding and distinct visions of modernity while allowing leaders of decolonizing countries to pursue their political agendas independently of the two superpowers. Cf. as representative of recent research: Theodora Dragostinova, *The Cold War from the Margins: A Small Socialist State on the Global Cultural Scene* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021); Theodora Dragostinova and Malgorzata Fidelis, *Slavic Review* (Special Issue: Beyond the Iron Curtain: Eastern Europe and the Global Cold War) 77 no. 3 (2018); Mariusz Kałczewiak and Magdalena Kozłowska, eds., *The World Beyond the West: Perspectives from Eastern Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2022); Adam F. Kola, *Socjalistyczny postkolonializm: Rekonsolidacja pamięci* [Socialist Postcolonialism: The Reconsolidation of Memory] (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2018); James Mark, Artemy M. Kalinovsky, and Steffi Marung, eds., *Alternative Globalizations: Eastern Europe and the Postcolonial World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020); James Mark and Paul Betts, eds., *Socialism Goes Global: The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the Age of Decolonization; A Collectively Researched and Written Monograph*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022); James Mark and Tobias Rupprecht, "The Socialist World in Global History: From Absentee to Victim to Co-Producer," in *The Practice of Global History: European Perspectives*, ed. Matthias Middell (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 81–113.

societies and have partially linked the global history of yoga's dissemination with a history of capitalism and liberal consumer culture.

When exploring how yoga took root in socialism, one must consider two interlinked processes: the first relates to the transmission of yogic knowledge across space and time and points to questions of sources, interactions, and the overall position of socialist yoga popularizers in the global web of yoga flows. The second process is associated with the legitimization of yoga in the ideological context of state socialism as a prerequisite to its incorporation into state institutions.² Here, we focus on discursive strategies employed to align yoga with the political agendas of the socialist state, while taking into account concurrent ambiguities and contestations. Both processes are examined through the cases of Bartoňová and Pasek. Following Beatrix Hauser, we understand these yoga popularizers as “cultural brokers [...] who were familiar with (at least) two cultural worlds and thus able to communicate, transfer, and rationalise yoga in new settings.”³

Below, we first address how yoga came to be the subject of historical inquiry and how it has been conceptualized in more recent research as a modern psychophysical practice relying on transnational mediations, a view that also informs our approach. This is followed by the two case studies of Bartoňová and Pasek. Finally, we summarize our findings to draw conclusions regarding the place of state socialism in the global history of yoga.

1. Understanding Yoga as Modern and Transnational

Recent historical, anthropological, and religious studies research has deconstructed and de-essentialized the post-Romantic notion of yoga as a seamless, up to 5,000-year-old South Asian tradition. In doing so, newer work in the field has expanded our understanding of yoga to include modern, culturally and religiously hybrid practices. It outlined the history of “modern” or “transnational yoga,” which spans roughly the past 150 years, and encompasses bodily postures (*āsana*), breathing (*prāṇāyāma*) and meditation (*dhyāna*) techniques, along with sets of specific

2 It is important to note that we explicitly discuss yoga practices that were to some extent integrated into state-socialist institutions. In turn, this does not mean that there did not exist certain kinds of non-opportune yoga whose practitioners were subjected to marginalization or repression.

3 Beatrix Hauser, “Following the Transcultural Circulation of Bodily Practices: Modern Yoga and the Corporeality of Mantras,” in *Yoga in Transformation: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Karl Baier, Philipp André Maas, and Karin Preisendanz (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2018), 510.

beliefs about the meanings of these practices.⁴ A number of studies have shown that modern yoga has been significantly shaped by colonial and postcolonial transfers of knowledge between India and the Euro-American world.⁵ Yoga must thus be seen as a hybrid practice produced by an interplay of both “Eastern” and “Western” physical and spiritual cultures, prompting questions of cross-fertilization and re-interpretation across communities to emerge as central topics of research.⁶

As scholars have traced the global transfers constitutive of modern yoga, local and regional manifestations of the practice have come into view.⁷ Due to its situatedness and corporeality, yoga emerged anew with each sociocultural instantiation, or, as David Gordon White stated, “people have ‘reinvented’ yoga in their own image” numerous times.⁸ Against this backdrop, yoga scholarship directed attention to the influence of economic models and political systems on the discourse and phenomenology of yoga. Most recently, Andrea Jain argued that free (spiritual)

4 De Michelis can be credited with the term “Modern Yoga”, cf. Elizabeth de Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga: Patañjali and Western Esotericism* (London: Continuum, 2004), 2–6. Singleton countered with the notion of “transnational yoga”, cf. Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 9–10.

5 Seminal studies in this regard are: Joseph S. Alter, *Yoga in Modern India: The Body between Science and Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*; Singleton, *Yoga Body*; N. E. Sjoman, *The Yoga Tradition of the Mysore Palace* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1999); Sarah Strauss, *Positioning Yoga: Balancing Acts Across Cultures* (Oxford: Berg, 2005).

6 Beatrix Hauser, “Introduction: Transcultural Yoga(s); Analyzing a Traveling Subject,” in *Yoga Traveling: Bodily Practice in Transcultural Perspective*, ed. Beatrix Hauser (Cham: Springer, 2013), 18–21.

7 Beyond South Asia, scholars focused on North America and Europe. Illustrative are: Wade Dazey, “Yoga in America: Some Reflections from the Heartland,” in *Theory and Practice of Yoga: Essays in Honour of Gerald James Larson*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 409–24; Philip Deslippe, “The Swami Circuit: Mapping the Terrain of Early American Yoga,” *Journal of Yoga Studies* 1 (2018): 5–44; Suzanne Newcombe, *Yoga in Britain: Stretching Spirituality and Educating Yogis* (Bristol: Equinox Publishing, 2019). A decentering can be observed in recent articles on yoga in Japan, Korea, and Latin America: Hidehiko Kurita, “The Political History of Meditation and Yoga in Japan,” in *Routledge Handbook of Yoga and Meditation Studies*, ed. Suzanne Newcombe and Karen O’Brien-Kop (London: Routledge, 2020), 307–24; Kwangsoo Park and Younggil Park, “Yoga and Meditation in Korea,” in Newcombe and O’Brien-Kop, 325–34; Adrián Muñoz, “Yoga in Latin America: A Critical Overview,” in Newcombe and O’Brien-Kop, 335–59. As for pre-war Poland, consider Agata Świerzowska, *Joga w Polsce od końca XIX wieku do 1939 roku: Konteksty ezoteryczne i interpretacje [Yoga in Poland from the late 19th century to 1939: Esoteric contexts and interpretations]* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2019).

8 David Gordon White, “Introduction: Yoga, Brief History of an Idea,” in *Yoga in Practice*, ed. David Gordon White, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 2.

markets and Western consumer culture were prerequisites for the rise of postural yoga systems to global prominence.⁹

A focus on the story of yoga in East European countries governed by socialism and determined by the absence of civil liberties and free markets until late in the 20th century can accentuate our understanding of modern transnational yoga. Since this perspective has hardly been taken so far, our knowledge about the scope of yoga in the region as well as the discourses and policies surrounding it is limited. It is clear, however, that the former Eastern bloc did not have a uniform approach to yoga. The attitude toward yoga in the Soviet Union, for instance, alternated between appropriation and legal ostracism.¹⁰ Overall, the spectrum ranged from condemnation, as was the case in the GDR until well into the 1980s, to open connections of governmental politics with certain esoteric and yoga scenes in late socialist Bulgaria.¹¹ Czechoslovakia and Poland can be considered as country cases where the practice was among the most institutionalized in Eastern Europe.¹² In both countries, the state's attitude toward yoga was characterized by ambivalence. State representatives sometimes regarded the practice as spiritual and therefore politically perilous (especially in Czechoslovakia), but at other times as a benign recreational activity that could figure in preventive health programs. While these views competed throughout, the late socialist state in particular showed tolerance for activities that seemed ideologically suspicious, as long as they did not lead to protest and anti-state action.¹³ We will explore this further in the subsequent section

9 Andrea R. Jain, *Selling Yoga: From Counterculture to Pop Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 43–50. Cf. additionally: Andrea R. Jain, *Peace, Love, Yoga: The Politics of Global Spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020); Strauss, *Positioning Yoga*, 57–59.

10 Sergey Pakhomov, "A Short History of Yoga in the USSR," *New Age in Russia* (blog), last modified June 26, 2021, accessed March 16, 2023, <https://newageru.Hypotheses.org/3407>.

11 Veneta T. Ivanova, "Socialism with an Occult Face: Aesthetics, Spirituality, and Utopia in Late Socialist Bulgaria," *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 20, no. 10 (2020): 1–24; Mathias Tietke, *Yoga in der DDR: Geächtet, geduldet, gefördert [Yoga in the GDR: Ostracized, tolerated, promoted]* (Kiel: Ludwig, 2014).

12 For an important contribution on the Czechoslovak case, cf. Milan Fujda, "Acculturation of Hinduism and the Czech Traditions of Yoga," in *Spaces and Borders: Current Research on Religion in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. András Máté-Tóth and Cosima Rughinis, 81–102 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011). While we focus on the aspect of the global transmission and institutionalization of yoga, Fujda is primarily interested in the intellectual history of its reception in Czechoslovakia.

13 Christiane Brenner, Michal Pullmann, and Anja Tippner, "After Utopia: Introductory Remarks on Normalization in Czechoslovakia," in *After Utopia: Czechoslovak Normalization Between Experiment and Experience, 1968–1989*, ed. Christiane Brenner, Michal Pullmann and Anja Tippner (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022),

where we follow the trajectories of the two yoga popularizers Milada Bartoňová and Tadeusz Pasek.

2. Brokers and Networkers: Milada Bartoňová, Tadeusz Pasek, and the Integration of Yoga into State Socialism

The cases of Milada Bartoňová and Tadeusz Pasek reveal several aspects characteristic of the institutionalization of yoga in socialist states. As will be shown below, both developed networks that included Indian and Western yoga representatives as well as domestic health experts and sports officials. This cultivation of personal relationships at domestic and international levels was central to their projects of popularizing yoga in their home countries. Both Bartoňová's and Pasek's networking abilities were based on their capacities to speak (and occasionally mix) different languages. Fluency in English, eventually supplemented by the knowledge of Hindi, was central to their contacts with India. By contrast, successful communication at home demanded strategic deployment of the codes of socialist health and leisure policies directed toward chronic disease prevention and economic productivity, as well as the partly esoterically infused language of domestic yoga practitioners interested in self-improvement and embodied experiences. Bartoňová's and Pasek's mastery of these languages and codes enabled them to establish state-wide infrastructures for the apprehension and practice of yoga.

For all the similarities, our case studies highlight important differences between the two yoga popularizers. Bartoňová, shaped by her modest upbringing in a devotedly religious (albeit nondenominational) home, developed a pronounced spiritual understanding of yoga. Parallel to her official activity as a yoga popularizer, in which she emphasized the athletic aspects and health benefits of the practice, she regularly gathered private circles of spiritually-minded students. In contrast, Pasek, who came from an aristocratic and educated background, developed an intellectual and scientific perception of yoga. He had a keen interest in yoga's physical and mental health effects which he sought to substantiate in collaboration with physiologists. His philosophical understanding, on the other hand, was oriented toward universal ethics and guidelines for a disciplined way of life. Through their characteristic interpretations of yoga, Bartoňová and Pasek significantly shaped the

5,11; Security Services Archive Prague (hereinafter: SSAP), OB – 1796 MV, „Informace o činnosti jógy na území ČSSR [Information about yoga activity on the territory of the ČSSR]“, Apr. 21, 1980, sheets 4-5.

ways the practice was understood in their respective countries. While esoteric and spiritual approaches to yoga appear to have been more prevalent among practitioners in Czechoslovakia, a striving for general mental calmness and the attainment of techniques of self-governance can be identified as the main goals of the practice in the Polish case.

Bartoňová's and Pasek's stories are connected by their study trips to India – trips that can only be understood in the context of the rivalry between the Eastern and Western blocs that played out in the “unique geopolitical space” of non-aligned India, “one of the Cold War's key battlegrounds.”¹⁴ In 1968, both Bartoňová and Pasek completed a yoga teacher training course at the Bihar School of Yoga (BSY) in Munger, where they most likely met.¹⁵ The BSY was founded by Swami Satyananda in 1963 and follows the so-called Sivananda Yoga lineage. It was affiliated with the International Yoga Fellowship Movement whose goal as a “charitable and educational institution” was “to impart yogic training to all nationalities” and “to disseminate the yogic tradition throughout the world.”¹⁶ This agenda was characteristic of the aspirations of many Indian gurus and their yoga schools, who, beginning in the early 20th century and with greater emphasis since the 1960s, had pursued a global mission to spread their teachings. As a result, the transmission of yogic knowledge was no longer a matter of an intimate guru-disciple relationship but rather an institutionalized, transnational enterprise increasingly supported by the Indian state and expanding well beyond South Asia.¹⁷ Bartoňová's and Pasek's stays at BSY were financially supported by their home countries' education and sports authorities, as Czechoslovakia and Poland, too, were interested in deepening their cultural ties with India. Hence, the geopolitical tensions of the Cold War in interaction with India's foreign cultural policies created space for individuals from Eastern Europe to insert themselves into global cultural flows.

Milada Bartoňová

In her memoirs, published in 2010, Bartoňová explains her attraction to yoga with childhood and youth experiences in the interwar years. Her

14 Małgorzata Mazurek, “Polish Economists in Nehru's India: Making Science for the Third World in an Era of De-Stalinization and Decolonization,” *Slavic Review* 77, no. 3 (2018): 592.

15 However, their encounter did not leave any traces in the available sources.

16 Bihar School of Yoga, *Past, Present & Future: Consolidated History of Bihar School of Yoga 1963-1994* (Munger: Bhargave Bhushan Press, 1995), Appendix (no page count).

17 Mark Singleton and Ellen Goldberg, “Introduction,” in *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, ed. Mark Singleton and Ellen Goldberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 4–5.

family, living in a village in the Moravian-Silesian Beskids, belonged to the *Friends of the Voice of Conscience*, a spiritual group that combined elements of Christianity with those of occultism, and whose members were opposed to scientific medicine and abstained from tobacco and alcohol. This group also circulated writings that awakened in Bartoňová a longing for the ‘wisdom of the East,’ including Rabindranath Tagore’s book of poems “The Gardener.”¹⁸

Bartoňová’s involvement with yoga began in the years surrounding the communist takeover in Czechoslovakia in February 1948. She was in her early forties at the time, and, having previously worked in unskilled jobs and as a primary school teacher, she studied philosophy and psychology in Prague. Bartoňová was introduced to yoga by her life partner Rostislav Hošek, who had acquired the practice through self-study.¹⁹ This privately conducted, autodidactic practice, which was largely made possible through *samizdat* manuals, is a typical feature of the development of yoga during the 1950s in Czechoslovakia.²⁰

In the postwar years, when Bartoňová began practicing, yoga enthusiasts could build on developments that had begun in the late 19th century, when indologists and members of occult circles in Bohemia and Moravia had entered into exchange with contemporary Indian yoga popularizers. Such traditions, carried on by mystics like František Drtikol (1883–1961) in the 1920s and 1930s, were still very much alive in the postwar period, even if they could only be cultivated in secrecy.²¹ At this stage the view of yoga as a ‘cult’ dominated among representatives of the atheistic Czechoslovak state.²²

18 Milada Bartoňová, *Jen jdu: Vzpomínky, myšlenky, vize* [Just going: Memories, thoughts, visions] (Praha: Isadora, 2010), 11–12, 30. On the Friends of the Voice of Conscience, cf. Martin Jemelka, “Bratrství a Život: Ostravská spiritistická scéna, její sociální zázemí a (nad)regionální kontakty (1918–1951) [Brotherhood and life: The spiritist scene of Ostrava, its social base and (supra)regional contacts (1918–1951)],” *Studia theologica* 20, no. 1 (2018): 173–76.

19 Bartoňová, *Jen jdu*, 21–36.

20 Cf. the interviews with contemporary yoga practitioners Gejza Timčák and Josef Tílich in Olga Tajovská, ed., *Spojení jógou: Rozhovory o cestách jógy* [Connected through yoga: Talks about the ways of yoga] (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2020), 17, 197.

21 Fujda, “Acculturation of Hinduism and the Czech Traditions of Yoga,” in Máté-Tóth and Rughinis, 89–91; Milan Fujda, *Akultura hinduismu a formování moderní religiozity: K sociálním dějinám českého okultismu, 1891–1941* [The acculturation of hinduism and the formation of modern religiosity: On the social history of Czech occultism, 1891–1941] (Praha: Malvern, 2010); Zdeněk Vojtíšek, “Weitere Glaubensrichtungen,” in *Handbuch der Religions- und Kirchengeschichte der böhmischen Länder und Tschechiens im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Martin Schulze Wessel and Martin Zückert (München: Oldenbourg, 2009), 232.

22 Cf. the interviews with contemporary practitioners cited in footnote 24.

This changed in the 1960s, when political liberalization in the wake of the Prague Spring allowed for freer expression of subcultural movements that were increasingly forming in Czechoslovakia. Not unlike the contemporary alternative milieus in the West, the proponents of such subcultures sought new ways of living and a sense of authenticity that they felt socialism could not offer, including a longing for re-enchantment by the ‘wisdom of the East.’²³ Under these conditions, a yoga scene began to crystallize in the country’s larger cities, which was further stimulated by visits of yoga ambassadors from India. One of them was Guru Ma Yoga Shakti, a woman who lived like an itinerant religious practitioner and who attracted much attention during her visit to Czechoslovakia in 1967. A disciple of Swami Satyananda, who headed the BSY, Ma Yoga Shakti invited people to travel to India and learn yoga under Satyananda’s guidance as she toured Europe.²⁴ Her visit to Czechoslovakia was an expression of BSY’s agenda to explicitly address the citizens of socialist states in its mission. The school’s dominant framing of yoga as “a universalist philosophy of science and a kind of dislocated transnational humanism rooted in the body”²⁵ established the possibility to appeal to citizens from both sides of the East-West conflict.²⁶

Milada Bartoňová was one of the first people in Czechoslovakia to take up this invitation. She was studying Hindi and Sanskrit at the time and held a position at the State Pedagogical Publishing House, where she was responsible for publications on Asian countries and cultures.

23 Zdeněk Vojtíšek, “Weitere Glaubensrichtungen,” in Schulze Wessel and Zückert, 761–62; Joachim C. Häberlen, Mark Keck-Szajbel and Kate Mahoney, ed., *The Politics of Authenticity: Countercultures and Radical Movements across the Iron Curtain, 1968–1989* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019); Juliane Fürst and Josie McLellan, eds., *Dropping Out of Socialism: The Creation of Alternative Spheres in the Soviet Bloc* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017).

24 Bartoňová, Jen jdu, 50.

25 Alter, *Yoga in Modern India*, 76.

26 The BSY program cannot be categorized unilaterally as either “scientific” or as “spiritual.” Instead, it eludes this dichotomy, which did not fit the thinking of the school’s leading figures. In strategic communication with guests from the Eastern bloc, however, scientific aspects were regularly brought to the fore. Thus, a pamphlet accompanying the training course attended by Bartoňová and Pasek states: “[Yoga] is a science, no doubt, otherwise men and women from communist countries like Czechoslovakia and Poland would not have been all agog for a course in Yoga here. These highly sophisticated persons would not have for nothing faced all the expenses and trouble for a long journey and braved all the too well known discomforts and inconveniences of life and living in the back waters of a provincial town of a foreign country for taking a pretty long course in Yoga!!” S. Gupta, *Introduction to The First International Yoga Assembly: Meeting at Monghyr on 1st July 1967 for 9 Months to Discuss, Formulate and Decide about the Future of Yoga Culture*, ed. The International Yoga Fellowship Movement and Bihar School of Yoga (Monghyr, 1967), 2.

Bartoňová received a scholarship from the Czechoslovak Ministry of Education for the trip, which was officially also intended to improve her language skills.²⁷ The participants of the yoga course came from Western Europe, North America, Israel, Japan, and Poland, among other countries. Many of them worked in education and health care and aimed to explore the application of yoga in these professional fields, participating in a transmission of yogic knowledge for the benefit of the helping professions. Also, a search for spiritual meaning and alternative ways of living motivated many to participate in the course. Partly isolated from the world outside the ashram, the students followed a specific daily routine, which included manual work in the kitchen and garden in addition to physical yoga exercises, meditation, and the study of spiritual foundations of yoga.²⁸ In her memoirs, Bartoňová describes her stay at Munger as a formative experience, an encounter with the “deepest truths of life.” In describing *antar mouna*, an exercise of silence lasting several days, she states that she succeeded in “allowing the inner silence to reign, not to speak even in thought, and to make herself open to the present moment” and “in this way to hear her very own silent voice.”²⁹ It is indicative of Bartoňová’s spiritual understanding of yoga that she retrospectively characterizes her stay in Munger primarily as a soteriological experience.

Bartoňová’s trip to India came at a time when Czechoslovak health and sports policies were changing. There was a growing concern with the prevention of chronic diseases, which was accompanied by an expansion of recreational sports to improve the health and labor productivity of the population. This trend continued after the suppression of the Prague Spring and intensified in the 1970s and 1980s.³⁰ The state’s prevention campaigns increasingly appealed to the self-responsibility of individuals with regard to maintaining their health and increasing their performance at work. In this context, the late socialist state pursued its biopolitical goals in new ways, resulting in the establishment of a governmentality based not only on paternalism and repression but, to a

27 Bartoňová, *Jen jdu*, 50.

28 Mirko Frýba, “Za jógou do Indie [To India for yoga],” *Mladý svět* 11, no. 7 (1969); Milada Bartoňová et al., *Jóga – od staré Indie k dnešku [Yoga – from ancient India to the present day]* (Praha: Avicenum zdravotnické nakladatelství, 1971), 200–202.

29 Bartoňová, *Jen jdu*, 56.

30 Lenka Kalinová, “Zdravotnictví [Healthcare],” in *Slovníková příručka k československým dějinám 1948–1989 [Encyclopedia-Handbook of Czechoslovak history 1948–1989]*, ed. Jiří Kocian (Praha: Ústav pro Soudobé Dějiny AV ČR, 2006).

greater extent than in previous decades, also on the self-government of individuals.³¹

Experts from fields such as sports science, preventive medicine and industrial psychology, who were often in close contact with specialists in the West, played an important role in underpinning these policies. The Czechoslovak Union for Physical Education and Sport (ČSTV) tried to stimulate the interest of Czechs and Slovaks in physical activity by offering a wide range of courses, including athletics, jazz gymnastics, and folk dancing.³² Such effects were also expected from yoga, which is why Bartoňová was invited to give lectures after her return from India and was soon offered a job at the Central Institute of Physical Culture that was affiliated with the ČSTV. Bartoňová not only became a state-employed yoga teacher, but she also participated in the development of a yoga course program for the state sports and recreation system. By the late 1970s, Bartoňová and her ČSTV colleagues had succeeded in establishing yoga clubs in numerous cities throughout Czechoslovakia, often using the gyms and practice facilities of state-organized recreational sports. By 1984, there were 105 such yoga clubs in Czechoslovakia, with a total of about 8,000 practitioners. In 1989, there were about 600 yoga teachers in the ČSTV and the number of practitioners reached a maximum of about 16,000.³³

31 This is true not only for Czechoslovakia, but appears to be the case for other socialist states as well. In this respect, research is increasingly exploring new avenues. Older work in the field usually emphasized the differences between East and West with regard to forms of governmentality and biopolitics: The dominant argument was that in many Western countries a neoliberal governmentality became influential since the 1960s, in which productivity and disease prevention became tasks of the individual and his or her ‘work on the self.’ State socialism, by contrast, was described as being characterized by a paternalistic form of leadership ‘from above.’ Recent research has challenged this dichotomy, highlighting instances where state-socialist regimes relied on forms of self-governance comparable to their Western counterparts, markedly since the 1960s. Cf. Jan Arend and Jens Elberfeld, “Psychologien der Menschenführung: Gouvernementalität und Therapeutisierung in Ost und West (1960er–1980er Jahre),” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 48, no. 2 (2022): 177–96; Claire Shaw and Anna Toropova, eds., *Technologies of Mind and Body in the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023); Henriette Voelker, “Socialist Governmentality? Healthcare, Technologies of the Self, and Subjectification in European State Socialism, 1945-1990,” *H-Soz-Kult*, November 4, 2020, www.hsozkult.de/event/id/event-131166.

32 Vlasta Kaplanová, “Jak vznikala naše unie jógy [How our Yoga Union came into being],” *unie-jogy*, 2011, <https://www.unie-jogy.cz/Historie-UJ.php>, accessed February 2, 2023.

33 Kaplanová, “Jak vznikala naše unie jógy”; J. Vlasák, “Příspěvek k dějinám jógy [A contribution to the history of yoga],” in *Bioterapie – magnetoterapie [Biotherapy – magnetotherapy]*, ed. Věnceslav Patrovský (Praha: VŠ TJ Medicina, 1987).

The yoga practice in the clubs combined physical-postural exercises from different yoga traditions. These quasi-gymnastic exercises constituted the official form of yoga permitted by the regime. Looking beneath this legal surface, however, one sees that in the case of many practitioners, yoga was embedded in broader forms of lifestyle (e.g., vegetarian diet, abstention from alcohol, but sometimes consumption of psychedelic substances) and a strong interest in 'esoteric' practices (such as astrology and certain forms of meditation). A typical representative of the yoga scene was Jiří Mazánek (b. 1952), a chemist from Pardubice. Around 1968, Mazánek became aware of magazine articles by Milada Bartoňová, in which individual yoga exercises were described. He practiced according to these texts, meditated, ate a meatless diet and occupied himself with horoscopes. In the 1970s, Mazánek came to Prague, where he found work at a library information center and in 1978 became a yoga instructor at the physical education department of the Sokol Prague Old Town Sports Club. Mazánek's yoga practice was part of his broader interest in Eastern cultures, including Indian music. He cultivated the latter as a member of the band "Relaxace" (*Relaxation*), founded in the late 1980s, whose music included Indian-inspired meditation sounds.³⁴

Science became an important legitimizing resource for Bartoňová's project of institutionalizing yoga in Czechoslovakia. In an environment where scientific expertise was highly valued – the late socialist regime in Czechoslovakia showed technocratic tendencies – experts authenticated the health benefits of yoga practice. One leading scientific patron of yoga in Czechoslovakia was the neurophysiologist Ctibor Dostálek (1928-2011), who headed the Institute of Physiological Regulation at the Academy of Sciences from 1976. Early in his career, Dostálek developed an interest in the Indian healing art of *Āyurveda* and in the health effects of yoga. Since 1969, he traveled to India several times, learned Hindi, and maintained extensive scientific contacts in the country.³⁵ Experts like

34 SSAP, X. správa SNB [X. National Security Corps Management Unit], „Informace [Information]“, March 25, 1984, sheet 3; SSAP, KR_740719_MV_2_4, „Rozšíření sektánské tiskoviny Krišna People Jiřím Mazánkem v Ústavu vědeckotechnických informací – zpráva [The dissemination of printed materials of the Krishna People sect by Jiří Mazánek in the Institute of Scientific and Technical Information - Report.]“, June 19, 1980, sheet 2; SSAP, KR_740719_MV_1_4, „Zápis o výpovědy Ing. Mazánek Jiří [Transcript of the statement of Ing. Mazánek Jiří]“, February 19, 1979, sheets 1-2, 6.

35 Cf. the authors' interview with the physician Karel Nešpor (25 February 2021), who was a member of Dostálek's research group for a year and a half from 1978 onwards. On Dostálek's contacts in India and his language courses cf. Archives of the Czech Academy of Sciences Prague (hereinafter: ACASP), fond ÚFR ČSAV, sign. 61, inv. č. 128: „Zdůvodnění studijní cesty s. C. Dostálka [Justification of the study journey by C.

Dostálek consistently emphasized the scientific nature of their activities and avoided associating yoga with alternative lifestyles and spiritual pursuits in their public statements. At a medical conference in the spa town of Mariánské Lázně in September 1978, for example, Dostálek argued that yoga was “not directly linked to any ideology.” By this he implied that while the practice had no ideological proximity to communism, it did not necessarily have to be linked to religious teachings either. Yoga, according to Dostálek, helps people to become “more resistant” to the “stimuli resulting from the complexity of modern society.” Here, we see a discourse that invoked ideals of productivity and stress resistance by conceiving of yoga as a useful remedy for the benefit of the “modern man.”³⁶

Bartoňová adopted this scientized yoga discourse and used its legitimizing effects for her project of yoga institutionalization in state socialist Czechoslovakia. However, she also broke with the logic of this discourse in places. Her contemporary publications communicated effectively in two directions: with the representatives of the state health and sports policy on the one hand and with the representatives of a yoga scene (part of which were inclined toward the esoteric) on the other. This resulted in a language in which scientific-medical terms were mixed with esoteric vocabulary. For example, in a series of articles she wrote in 1973 in a magazine published by ČSTV, she spoke of the positive effects of yoga on certain “organ systems,” but also mentioned that in yoga the breath was considered an “appearance of cosmic energy.”³⁷ In this context, Bartoňová showed a good sense of the scope and limits of what could be said in the ideological context of late socialism in Czechoslovakia. The same can be said with regard to the book “Yoga - from Ancient India to Today,” which Bartoňová published in 1971 together with three co-authors. With a print run of 40,000 copies, this book became the most widely used yoga manual in socialist Czechoslovakia.³⁸

Dostálek], Dec. 14, 1977. For the activities of other experts, cf. Jiří Votava, “Jóga [Yoga],” *Rehabilitácia. Časopis pre otázky liečebnej a pracovnej rehabilitácie* 12, no. 4 (1979); Jiří Votava and Jaroslav Šedivý, *Jóga očima lékařů [Yoga from the point of view of the medical profession]* (Praha: Avicenum, 1988); Věra Doležalová, *Jóga a zdraví [Yoga and health]* (Brno: Výbor svazu ZRTV MěV ČSTV Brno, 1984).

36 ACASP, fond ÚFR ČSAV, sign. 2, inv. č. 70, manuscript entitled „Jógická koncentrační cvičení v obraze EEG a EMG [Yoga concentration exercises in imaging by EEG and EMG]“ by C. Dostálek et al., no date, sheet 3. Also, cf. Fujda, “Acculturation of Hinduism,” in Máté-Tóth and Rughinis, 94-95.

37 Milada Bartoňová, “Jóga [Yoga],” *Základní tělesná výchova* 18, no. 7 (1973): 8.

38 Bartoňová et al., *Jóga – od staré Indie k dnešku*, 170, 172, 214, 218, 200-204.

Bartoňová cultivated a personal network that included yoga actors from different regions of the world. Of particular importance were contacts with Indian yoga ambassadors. Among them was Mukund Bhole from Lonavla in Western India, who repeatedly spent several months in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and early 1980s, cooperating with the academy scientists and guiding the yoga students of the ČSTV sports clubs. As a physician, Bhole embodied the modern reinvention of yoga in India, which sought to prove the benefits of the practice using the methods of modern science. At the Kaivalyadhama Yoga Research Institute in Lonavla – a leading institution that epitomized the agenda of “bringing together East and West,” or yoga and Western medicine – he researched, among other things, the therapeutic effects of yoga on asthma.³⁹ Former Air Force officer Surendra Nath Goyal (1917-2009), also spent several months in Czechoslovakia in the summer of 1979 at the invitation of Bartoňová’s institute. After returning to his home country, Goyal helped several Czechoslovak visitors who traveled to India in the footsteps of Bartoňová to learn yoga.⁴⁰ Yoga actors from Western countries were also part of Bartoňová’s network and visited Czechoslovakia, among them André van Lysebeth and Gérard Blitz, the two founders of the *European Union of Yoga*, which brought together several national yoga organizations from Western Europe. Lysebeth, a particularly influential yoga popularizer with long experience in India, appeared at yoga teacher training courses organized by the ČSTV.⁴¹ Such global connections that were based on Bartoňová’s personal relationships were instrumental in the institutionalization of yoga in late socialist Czechoslovakia. The same applies to Tadeusz Pasek and the Polish case, to which we now turn.

Tadeusz Pasek

Pedagogue and economist Tadeusz Pasek (1925-2011) was not the first to speak prominently about yoga in socialist Poland,⁴² but through his

39 SSAP, OB/HK, OB-544 HK, document entitled „Dr. Mukherdjee Mukhund [sic!] Bhole – styky v ČSSR [Dr. Mukherdjee Mukhund [sic!] Bhole – contacts in the ČSSR]“, Jan. 12, 1981; ACASP, fond ÚFR ČSAV, sign. 64, inv. č. 145, letter by C. Dostálek to M.V. Bhole, May 20, 1977. On the Kaivalyadhama Yoga Research Institute, cf. Alter, *Yoga in Modern India*, 73-108.

40 SSAP, KR_740719_MV_1_4, document entitled „Záznam o šetření v akci Nirvána III [Note on the investigation in the operation Nirvana III]“, Sept. 21, 1979.

41 SSAP, OB-HK, 544 „Sekty“ [Sects], „Přehled přednášek ze soustředění instruktorů jógy, pořádaného ČSTV v Dobřichovicích ve dnech 27.5.–30.5.1977 [Overview of lectures at the meeting of yoga teachers held by the ČSTV in Dobřichovice May 27 – 30, 1977]“, no date (approximately June 1977), sheets 1 and 7.

42 From 1957-58, Jerzy Grotowski gave lectures on Hindu and Oriental philosophy, including yoga, at a student club in Kraków. Cf. Zbigniew Osiński, *Grotowski i jego labo-*

research, teaching, and promotion of the practice he shaped it significantly and endowed it with enduring popularity. Pasek was born in Poznań, in the region of Greater Poland (*Wielkopolska*), into a wealthy family descending from Lithuanian Tatar nobility. Rooted in the intelligentsia, the family attached great importance to education and Pasek showed himself particularly apt at foreign languages, for example English, the knowledge of which was to play an important role in his later yoga activities.⁴³ Growing up in Poznań, Pasek experienced a vibrant city with a newly founded university and an international trade fair at the western fringes of interwar Poland. As a hub of education and commerce, Poznań embodied contemporary ideas of modernity, progress, and cosmopolitanism. After the German occupation of the city in the Second World War, Pasek and his family were expelled and resettled in the General Government. There, he joined the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa* – the armed forces of the Polish Underground State) and, thanks to his language skills, was deployed as a courier. After the war and upon return to Poznań, Pasek studied pedagogy and economics, graduating in 1951.⁴⁴ It is reasonable to suggest that Pasek’s early experiences fostered within him curiosity and worldliness which in turn enabled him to develop managerial acumen, social dexterity, and strong communication skills. Later, these capacities would prove beneficial in establishing relevant networks in the country and abroad to advance his project of disseminating yoga in Poland.

The story of Pasek’s initiation into yoga in the early 1960s is usually told (by himself and his followers) along a narrative pattern of self-initiative and self-healing. Throughout his thirties, he had been suffering from “neurosis, fatigue, and general weakness.”⁴⁵ Doctors had already given up on his condition when he came across Wincenty Lutosławski’s

ratorium [Grotowski and his laboratory] (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1980), 39–41. Additionally, self-taught yoga entrepreneur Malina Michalska caused quite a buzz by offering postural yoga classes in Warsaw between 1962 and her death in 1973. Jerzy Pietrzak, “Michalska Malina,” in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1975), 577. Her book-length and widely popular yoga manual was first published in 1972. Cf. Malina Michalska, *Hatha-joga dla wszystkich* [Hatha-yoga for all] (Warszawa: Państwowy Zakład Wydawnictw Lekarskich, 1972).

43 Iwona Kozłowiec, “Gadu-guru staje na głowie [The chat-guru stands on his head],” *Przestrzeń: Pismo Stowarzyszenia Trenerów i Praktyk Relaksacji* 8 (2015): 8.

44 AIPN, IPN Po 822/90371, “Akta paszportowe o sygnaturze EAPO: Pasek Tadeusz Tomasz, imię ojca: Walenty, data urodzenia: 21-09-1925 [Passport file reference EAPO: Pasek, Tadeusz Tomasz, father’s name: Walenty, date of birth Sept. 21, 1925],” sheet 8.

45 Jerzy Suszko, “Joga [Yoga],” *Perspektywy: Ilustrowany Tygodnik Polityczno-Informacyjny*, December 7, 1973, 10.

turn-of-the-century yoga manual *The development of will power through psychophysical exercises according to ancient Aryan traditions and my own experience [...]*⁴⁶ and began practicing the proposed breathing and meditation exercises.⁴⁷ Intrigued by their strengthening effects, he initiated correspondence with the Indian yoga guru Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh in 1963,⁴⁸ subsequently becoming one of his “disciple[s]-by-mail.”⁴⁹ From the onset, yoga carried for Pasek the promise of alleviation from mental and physical struggles and constituted a way of transcending established approaches to healing and recuperation.

Pasek’s contacts in India allowed him to attend yoga teacher trainings at the BSY in Munger and the Kaivalyadhama Institute in Lonavla in 1967/68. His trip was supported by the Main Committee for Physical Culture and Tourism (GKKFiT) and the Academy of Physical Education (AWF) in Warsaw,⁵⁰ which, as mentioned, reflected political and economic interests of the socialist state in India. Beyond such interests, however, the country carried cultural significance in socialist Poland. Certain parts of the Polish population came to view democratic India as the ‘little West’ and a place where one could experience relative freedom. Apart from engineers, economists, and other specialists, young people traveled to the subcontinent under partly adventurous circumstances, be it for semi-legal small-scale trade, alpinism in the Himalaya,⁵¹ or the apprehension of yoga. In addition to living in the ashram, Pasek,

46 Wincenty Lutosławski, *Rozwój potęgi woli przez psychofizyczne ćwiczenia według dawnych aryjskich tradycji oraz własnych swoich doświadczeń podaje do użytku rodaków Wincenty Lutosławski* [The development of will power through psychophysical exercises according to ancient Aryan traditions and my own experience gives for the use of compatriots Wincenty Lutosławski] (Kraków: Gebethner i Wolff, 1909).

47 Krystyna Nasiukiewicz, *Wszystko o...: Joga* [Everything about...: Yoga] (Warszawa: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1980), 56.

48 “Sw. Sivananda to Tadeusz Pasek, April 10, 1963,” in “Prekursor jogi w Polsce: Wspomnienie o Tadeuszu Pasku (1925-2011) [Precursor of yoga in Poland: A memory of Tadeusz Pasek (1925-2011)],” by Iwona Kozłowiec (diploma thesis, Akademia Wychowania Fizycznego we Wrocławiu, 2015), 8. Sivananda, founder of the Divine Life Society, was one of the most influential gurus of the 20th century. Cf. Lise McKean, *Divine Enterprise: Gurus and the Hindu Nationalist Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 164–84.

49 Strauss, *Positioning Yoga*, 41.

50 AIPN, IPN Po 822/90371, “Akta paszportowe o sygnaturze EAPO: Pasek Tadeusz Tomasz, imię ojca: Walenty, data urodzenia: 21-09-1925”, sheet 8.

51 Max Cegielski, “Polacy w Azji 1945–89. ‘Kominternowski europocentryzm’ czy wschodnie okno na świat? [Poles in Asia 1945-89: ‘Comintern eurocentrism’ or Eastern window to the world?],” in *Polska & Azja: Od Rzeczypospolitej Szlacheckiej do Nangar Khel. Przewodnik interdyscyplinarny [Poland & Asia: From the Noble Republic to Nangar Khel. An interdisciplinary guide]*, ed. Max Cegielski (Poznań: Fundacja Malta, 2013), 67–89.

too, used his time in India to travel the country and connect with further yoga institutions.⁵²

Upon his return, he conducted empirical studies that would confirm claims of the health-promoting psychophysical effects of yoga together with physiologist Wiesław Romanowski at the AWF in Warsaw.⁵³ A result of this cooperation was the publication of the popular manual *Theory and methodology of relaxation-concentration exercises*,⁵⁴ which proved to be Romanowski's and Pasek's most influential book reaching five editions by 1993 with circulation numbers between 20,000 and 30,000 copies. Romanowski invented the title as a stopgap solution in response to censors who did not want to see the term 'yoga' prominently featured. Emphasizing "concentration" and "relaxation" instead, he framed the book as a contribution to the state's goals of preventing disease and increasing the productivity of mental labor. Until the 1980s, the green book with the stylized stick figure on the cover was a key source for Poles interested in yoga and for many the starting point of their own practice.⁵⁵

Tadeusz Pasek's concept of yoga operated within a comprehensive framework of health and moral education. In alignment with socialist ideology and biopolitical directives, the primary goal of Pasek's approach was to cultivate disciplined and functional individuals. Primarily focused on relaxation, it represents an example of what Elizabeth de Michelis called „modern psychosomatic yoga“.⁵⁶ As Pasek positioned himself as an intermediary between East and West, he saw his main task in adapting yoga to suit the “morphological and cultural characteristics of Western individuals”⁵⁷ to avoid unspecified but potentially severe “negative consequences”⁵⁸ on the practitioner. In contrast to the yoga

52 Kozłowiec, “Gadu-guru staje na głowie,” 11-12.

53 Among a range of papers published until Romanowski's death in 1973, cf. the most widely cited one: Wiesław Romanowski et al., “Próba fizjologicznej i psychologicznej oceny wpływu na organizm ćwiczeń według systemu jogi [An attempt at the physiological and psychological assessment of the effects of exercise on the body according to the yoga system],” *Wychowanie Fizyczne i Sport*, no. 3 (1969): 139–70.

54 Wiesław Romanowski, ed., *Teoria i metodyka ćwiczeń relaksowo-koncentrujących* [Theory and methodology of relaxation-concentration exercises] (Warszawa: Państwowy Zakład Wydawnictw Lekarskich, 1973).

55 Interview with Anna Romanowska (Sept. 3, 2021).

56 De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 188.

57 Cf. for example Tadeusz Pasek, “Ogólnoregeneracyjne i ogólnousprawniające ćwiczenia relaksowo-koncentrujące wzorowane na jodze i zen [General recovery and general fitness relaxation-concentration exercises modeled on yoga and zen],” in *Teoria i metodyka ćwiczeń relaksowo-koncentrujących* [Theory and methodology of relaxation-concentration exercises], ed. Stanisław Grochmal, (Warszawa: Państwowy Zakład Wydawnictw Lekarskich, 1986), 252.

58 *Ibid.*, 258.

taught at BSY, Pasek introduced a simplified system comprising just 13 *āsanas* alongside the dynamic sequence of *sūryanamaskār* (sun salutations), or – in Pasek’s parlance – “rhythmic-concentrating gymnastics.”⁵⁹ These exercises, accompanied by breathing and meditation practices, aimed to convey the core regenerative effects of yoga for the average European practitioner, while avoiding excessive physical strain or perspiration.⁶⁰ Whereas Pasek’s instructors were to demonstrate “strong suggestive abilities,”⁶¹ his written directives are characterized by a rather dry, didactic-technical style. Avoiding overly spiritual insinuations, Pasek’s methodology nonetheless drew from vitalistic concepts of the subtle body and the potential manipulation of one’s life force (or ‘energy’) through suitable psychophysical techniques,⁶² often reframed rhetorically within contemporary theories of bioelectronics. This underpinned recommendations such as aligning the body with the earth’s magnetic field during exercise, orienting it in a northerly or easterly direction.⁶³ Furthermore, his recommendations encompassed general dietary and hygiene guidelines, advocating for vegetarianism, abstaining from alcohol and tobacco, and maintaining a structured daily routine. In doing so, Pasek presented common-sense advice for a practical way of living, in line with contemporary ideals of rational conduct. This underscored his efforts to firmly embed yoga within the established structure of socialist physical culture and, more generally, social education.

Like Bartoňová, Pasek proved to be an apt networker and acted as an initiator for the propagation of yogic knowledge and practice during the 1960s and 1970s. For example, he established important contacts with representatives of state-sponsored popular sports. He was thus able to utilize the nationwide infrastructure of the Association for the Promotion of Physical Culture (TKKF), a mass sports organization subordinate to the GKKFiT. Pasek began teaching yoga at a gymnasium in Warsaw’s Ochota district in 1968. The three-tiered yoga courses of three to four months each soon spread to other TKKF branches in the country and became part of its regular curriculum. Since there was criticism that they were not available in sufficient numbers, Pasek sought to keep up with the demand by facilitating teacher trainings and initializing addi-

59 Ibid., 297.

60 Ibid., 331.

61 Ibid., 332.

62 A comprehensive historical and geographical overview of the idea of the subtle body is offered by Simon Cox, *The Subtle Body: A Genealogy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022).

63 Pasek, “Ogólnoregeneracyjne i ogólnousprawniające ćwiczenia relaksowo-koncentrujące wzorowane na jodze i zen,” 338.

tional programs such as annual yoga camps.⁶⁴ He ideologically supported his popularizing activities by touring the country and giving lectures on the health benefits of yoga with titles such as “Yoga dietetics and the principles of modern nutrition”⁶⁵ or “Relaxation-concentration exercises based on yoga and zen in combating the stresses of modern man.”⁶⁶ Under Pasek’s aegis, the “Polish model of relaxation-concentration exercises”⁶⁷ branched out into psychotherapy and the treatment of drug addiction at psychiatric institutions near Wrocław and in Poznań.⁶⁸ Also in Poznań, Pasek established two dedicated yoga clubs in the estates of local housing cooperatives with the goal of teaching ways for “better control and resistance of the nervous system.”⁶⁹ These facilities, which Pa-

64 Henryk Flieger and Jan Oździński, “Analiza zainteresowań formami rekreacji fizycznej mieszkańców województwa poznańskiego na bazie działalności stałych zespołów ćwiczebnych statutowych ognisk TKKF [Analysis of the interest in forms of physical recreation of residents of the Poznań province on the basis of activities of permanent exercise teams of statutory TKKF centers],” in *Czas wolny i rekreacja różnych środowisk społecznych w Polsce. Materiały Konferencji Naukowej, Poznań, dnia 23 i 24 listopada 1977 r.* [Leisure time and recreation of various social environments in Poland. Proceedings from the Scientific Conference, Poznań, Nov. 23–24, 1977], (Poznań: Akademia Wychowania Fizycznego w Poznaniu, 1979), 248–49; Tadeusz Pasek, “Ćwiczenia relaksowo-koncentrujące jogi [Yoga relaxation-concentration exercises],” *Rekreacja Fizyczna* 16, no. 1 (1973): 12–13.

65 Archive of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences, fond: Towarzystwo Przyjaźni Polsko-Indyjskiej [Polish-Indian Friendship Society], sign. KI – 13, Korespondencja, polecenia, wytyczne do działania Koła od Z.G. od założenia Koła do końca 1969 r. [Correspondence, orders, directives for the circle’s activities from the General Board from the founding of the circle to the end of 1969], letter from Jan Hadyna to the editorial office of *Dziennik Polski* [The Polish Daily] in Kraków (Apr. 1, 1963).

66 “Działalność PTO [Activities of the Polish Orientalist Society],” *Przegląd Orientalistyczny*, no. 4 (1976): 486.

67 Tadeusz Pasek et al., “Wzorowany program zajęć i uwagi metodyczne dla zespołów ćwiczeń relaksowo-koncentrujących wzorowanych na jodze przeznaczony dla ognisk TKKF [Sample program of classes and methodological notes for teams of relaxation-concentration exercises modeled on yoga designed for TKKF centers]” (training material from the private archive of Jerzy Modrzyński, Poznań, 1981), 6.

68 Elżbieta Niedźwiedzka-Sadowska, “Joga i zen przeciw narkomanii [Yoga and zen against drug addiction],” *WTK*, February 10, 1974, 8, 10. Tadeusz Pasek, “Ćwiczenia relaksowo-koncentrujące jako jedna z form rehabilitacji chorych psychicznie [Relaxation-concentration exercises as one of the forms of rehabilitation of mentally ill patients],” *Psychiatria Polska* 16, no. 5–6 (1982): 371–75.

69 Tadeusz Pasek, “‘Calming Centers’ in the Housing Estates in Poland Using Relaxation-Concentrating Exercises as a New Form of Recreation,” in *Der Mensch und seine Freizeit, 1980 – Man and Leisure, 1980 – L’homme et son loisir, 1980: 17–20 April 1980, Poznań/Poland*, ed. European Leisure and Recreation Association, General Committee for Physical Culture and Sport in Poland, and Academy of Physical Education in Poznań, Poland (Zürich: ELRA, 1980), 214.

sek called “oases of peace and quiet,”⁷⁰ consisted of two rooms: a tea-room with international educational literature on “health-promoting behavior, mental hygiene, and Indian culture”⁷¹ and an exercise room,

in which the curtains, walls, and floor coverings are the color of calm, pine green. There is [...] nothing that could have a distracting effect [...]. Even shoes must be taken off before entering the room and the shoe rack has its place in the corridor.⁷²

During 45-minute yoga classes, the instructor’s voice was to guide students through sun salutations, static *āsanas*, and meditation while somber Indian music was playing from tape.⁷³ The cooperation with representatives of organized recreational sports represents a parallel between Pasek and Bartoňová and was crucial to the institutionalization of yoga in their countries. Both understood how to employ a discourse that presented yoga as a health-promoting physical exercise devoid of religious or spiritual references. However, differences between the two yoga popularizers also become apparent: while in Bartoňová’s case the ‘athletization’ of yoga constituted primarily a strategic framing in dealing with the representatives of an atheist state, for Pasek it expressed aspects of his very own understanding of yoga.

Similar to Bartoňová, Pasek was regionally and globally interconnected. Already during his time in India, he established relations with various yoga institutes.⁷⁴ On this basis and with support of the Indian Embassy in Warsaw, he managed the Polish edition of Swami Kuvalayananda’s key publication *Yogic Therapy*.⁷⁵ Literature reviews and extensive citation of international sources testify to his knowledge of international

70 Tadeusz Pasek, “Osiedlowy ośrodek ćwiczeń relaksowo-koncentrujących w profilaktyce i terapii podtrzymującej zaburzeń nerwicowych. Referat na XXXIII Zjeździe Naukowym Psychiatrów Polskich [The residential relaxation-concentration exercise center in the prevention and maintenance therapy of neurotic disorders. Paper at the 33rd Scientific Congress of Polish Psychiatrists],” in XXXIII Zjazd Naukowy Psychiatrów Polskich. Kraków, 24–25 czerwca 1979 r., ed. Adam Szymusik (Kraków: PTP, 1979), 103.

71 Jadwiga Siwiec, “Joga dla współczesnych, czyli o ćwiczeniach relaksowo-koncentrujących [Yoga for contemporaries or relaxation-concentration exercises],” *Żyjmy Dłużej* 33, no. 5 (1980): 21.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

74 Iwona Kozłowiec, “Prekursor jogi w Polsce: Wspomnienie o Tadeuszu Pasku (1925-2011) [Precursor of Yoga in Poland: A memory of Tadeusz Pasek (1925-2011)]” (diploma thesis, Akademia Wychowania Fizycznego we Wrocławiu, 2015), 55–56.

75 Swami Kuvalayananda and S. L. Vinekar, *Joga – indyjski system leczniczy: Podstawowe zasady i metody [Yoga – the Indian healing system: Basic principles and methods]*, trans. Tadeusz Pasek and Wiesław Kukła (Warszawa: Państwowy Zakład Wydawnictw Lekarskich, 1970).

developments in yoga research.⁷⁶ Moreover, Pasek collaborated with yoga specialists in Czechoslovakia such as the physician Jiří Votava and the aforementioned physiologist Ctibor Dostálek – contacts that led him to speak of a “Warsaw-Prague axis.”⁷⁷ In the late 1970s, he helped found the *International Socialist Yoga Association*, modelled on the *European Union of Yoga*.⁷⁸ Although the organization was short-lived, these connections attest to Pasek’s awareness of global developments in yoga, where transmission of knowledge is multidirectional and both Poland and Czechoslovakia occupied nodes in the global network of yoga.

Ultimately, Pasek’s relations with North American universities, mediated through ties with the Polonia, proved to be his strongest resource. In December 1981, when the imposition of martial law in Poland put an end to the freedoms achieved by the *Solidarność* movement, Pasek attended a conference in Canada. He decided not to return, but to continue his work in Toronto, where he died in 2011.⁷⁹ While yoga in Poland was virtually synonymous with Tadeusz Pasek’s teachings until the early 1980s, his departure gave way to a diversification of the Polish yoga scene and a younger generation of practitioners turned towards lineages of “Modern Postural Yoga,”⁸⁰ most notably Iyengar Yoga. At the same time, the TKKF was still able to expand its network of yoga clubs⁸¹ and Pasek’s model of gentle body-oriented yoga with an emphasis on relaxation techniques eventually evolved into what today figures as *Academic Yoga* in the Polish yoga scene.⁸²

Conclusion

‘Cultural brokers,’ i.e., culturally and socially agile mediators, are of central importance for the transmission and propagation of yogic knowledge. While this is well-documented for capitalist societies with their open spiritual marketplaces, previous research knew little about the mechanisms of institutionalizing yoga in a state-socialist context. The

76 Cf. for example Pasek, “Ogólnoregeneracyjne i ogólnousprawniające ćwiczenia relaksowo-koncentrujące wzorowane na jodze i zen,” 346–50.

77 “Tadeusz Pasek to former colleagues in Poland, Dec. 1, 1991,” in Kozłowiec, “Prekursor jogi w Polsce,” 120.

78 E-mail from Gejza Timčák, Sept. 22, 2022.

79 Kozłowiec, “Gadu-guru staje na głowie,” 18.

80 De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, 187.

81 “Na Winogradach ćwiczenia podpatrzone w Indiach [Exercises copied from India in Winogrady],” *Głos Wielkopolski*, January 30, 1984, 5.

82 “Stowarzyszenie Jogi Akademickiej – Academic Yoga Association,” Stowarzyszenie Jogi Akademickiej, accessed December 9, 2022, <https://www.jogaakademicka.pl/spages/view/id/30>.

case studies presented here on Milada Bartoňová and Tadeusz Pasek shed light on this topic: they demonstrate that the ability to navigate and translate between different cultures, communities, and milieus, to attract followers and build networks, was as crucial in late socialist Czechoslovakia and Poland as in Western Europe and North America. As yoga became established as a global, anglophone practice in the mid-20th century, the individual prerequisites for shaping its discourse and practice lay less in an individual's geographical origin or national citizenship than in his or her mindset, habitus, and educational level. Bartoňová and Pasek qualified through their knowledge of foreign languages, especially English, their cultural literacy, networking skills, and their eagerness for self-development. Initially, both were medical and spiritual laypersons. This, however, was not a disadvantage, but in some ways even helpful for their project of yoga institutionalization: by operating outside established professional structures, they were able to act as innovators at a hitherto unoccupied intersection of leisure, sport, and self-improvement. In time, they acquired positions in organizations of the socialist state related to health and physical culture, which ensured them material sufficiency and a certain social status. Their activities between the 1960s and the 1980s helped transform yoga from a marginal, almost unrecognizable phenomenon into an institutionally established practice.

Their personal motivations notwithstanding, Bartoňová's and Pasek's engagement with yoga was both enabled and determined by the larger geopolitical realities of what has been called "socialist" or "alternative globalizations."⁸³ These terms refer to the multifaceted political, economic, and cultural interdependencies between post-war Eastern Europe and the Global South challenging our understandings of both Western hegemony in globalization and Soviet hegemony over smaller Eastern European countries. Thus, Bartoňová and Pasek benefited from a favorable diplomatic climate that had emerged between postcolonial, non-aligned India under Prime Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi and socialist Czechoslovakia and Poland. The friendly political relations were a precondition for the state-socialist media to report considerably on contemporary yoga and to portray it as an exotic but ideologically compatible, modern, and desirable practice. From the actors' point of view, this framework permitted the development of networks of research and practice through study trips to India and visits by representatives of Indian yoga schools to Eastern Europe. Together with their

83 James Mark, Artemy M. Kalinovsky, and Steffi Marung, Introduction to *Alternative Globalizations: Eastern Europe and the Postcolonial World*, 5–6; Mark and Rupprecht, "The Socialist World in Global History: From Absentee to Victim to Co-Producer," 91.

Indian interlocutors, Bartoňová and Pasek thus anchored the process of the ‘socialist globalization’ in a set of bottom-up practices, contributing to the globalization of parts of socialist culture. Their activities demonstrate how individuals enacted agency, exploited opportunities, and engaged the spaces that opened up under the conditions of de-Stalinization and decolonization. In analyzing knowledge transmissions in the context of ‘socialist globalization,’ previous research has often focused on professional fields associated with development politics such as economics, infrastructure, and architecture.⁸⁴ The example of yoga shows how other types of knowledge more closely related to everyday culture shaped a growing interconnectedness between Eastern Europe and the Global South.

By focusing on actors like Bartoňová and Pasek, strategies of discursive legitimization of yoga become visible. First and foremost, both linked the practice to central biopolitical concerns of the late socialist state. Such concerns included the question of how to increase the productivity of intellectual labor, which was gaining importance in the context of an anticipated era of industrial automation. Pasek, in particular, emphasized “concentration” as the goal of yoga practice. Even more pronounced, both yoga popularizers stressed the aspect of physical training and preventive health care. In the case of Bartoňová, a tactical moment can be detected here: her emphasis on the athletic aspects of yoga in official contexts served to conceal spiritual inclinations. Pasek’s understanding of yoga as oriented toward self-governance, on the other hand, was relatively easy to reconcile with the authorities’ interests. Bartoňová’s and Pasek’s differing emphases in their engagement with yoga point to the multiplicity of meanings that could be attached to yoga in socialist Czechoslovakia and Poland. Overall, the fact that yoga could take root in state socialism illustrates the increasing elasticity of socialist ideology in the last two decades of state socialism. Under the guise of a supposedly unambiguous ideological language, pluralized meanings began to emerge. To an even greater extent than in earlier periods, the question of what could be considered socialist became a matter of negotiation.⁸⁵ Under this premise, even yoga, which some contemporaries considered a cult-like practice,⁸⁶ could be accepted as an element of socialist leisure culture.

84 Indicative are: Mazurek, “Polish Economists in Nehru’s India;” Łukasz Stanek, *Architecture in Global Socialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

85 Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 77–125.

86 For a Czechoslovak example, cf. SSAP, KR_740719_MV_2_4, “Návrh na provedení profylakticko-rozkladného a preventivně výchovného opatření v akci Nirvána III. sig.sv. č. 31385 [Proposal for the implementation of a prophylactic-dismantling and

The cases of Czechoslovakia and Poland can advance our understanding of the place of modern yoga in a globalizing world. Beginning in the 1960s, the pursuit of economic productivity and the preservation of the workforce gained importance in state policy on both sides of the Iron Curtain. As our article elucidates, the context of advanced modernity paved the way for the popularization of yoga not only in the Western hemisphere but also in Eastern bloc countries. In both regions, the most established forms of yoga were psychophysical practices whose suitability for the everyday lives of practitioners had to be ensured through considerable secularization and mediation in easily accessible, institutionalized settings.⁸⁷ This highlights how yoga adapted to fit differing normative frameworks. While yoga demonstrated its compatibility with hegemonic liberal ideologies in the West, it was also capable of being contextualized within the socialist framework. Thus, considering state socialist countries in the history of the global proliferation of yoga not only fills a regional research gap. It contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of modern transnational yoga, whose dissemination was not solely driven by the forces of capitalism and liberal consumer culture.

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preventive-educational measure within the framework of Action Nirvana III, Signal File No. 31385],“ June 17, 1980.

87 For the comparative instance of Great Britain, cf. Newcombe, *Yoga in Britain*, 255–57.