

**External Examiner's Report on the Dissertation of Lubomír Ondračka**  
**"Charakter nesmrtelnosti v jógových textech"**  
**Submitted in 2022 at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies**

**I. Brief summary of the dissertation**

This doctoral thesis addresses the topic of "The Character of Immortality in Yogic Texts", arguing that, contrary to the claim made in all secondary literature for nearly a century that immortality in yoga occurs in a body that has become immaterial or ethereal, the corpus of texts on *haṭhayoga* teaches that immortality is obtained in the material body.

**II. Brief overall evaluation of the dissertation**

The dissertation is outstanding and requires little in the way of comment or criticism. It could be published as it is (with some minor copy-editing). It argues its thesis coherently and persuasively, thereby correcting a persistent misunderstanding about a key aspect of yogic doctrine. It is very clearly and engagingly written, displays a remarkable command of primary and secondary sources, and provides thoughtful analyses of all aspects of the subject under consideration. In the process of arguing its thesis, it also presents nuanced and original analyses of various other topics important for understanding the history of yoga, reflecting the author's deep engagement with the subject for more than two decades.

**III. Detailed evaluation of the dissertation and its individual aspects**

*1. Structure of the argument*

The argumentation of the thesis is very clear indeed. Its structure is laid out in the introduction in a way which corresponds precisely to the contents of the thesis itself, in which the argument remains clear throughout. The introduction explains precisely what the thesis aims to do and the author is altogether successful in achieving this objective.

*2. Formal aspects of the dissertation*

The thesis is very well presented with almost no typographical errors either in the main text or in words of Indian origin.

The referencing, abbreviation and bibliography are exemplary. The footnotes are appropriate, well formatted and often highly informative about subjects ancillary to the main topic of the dissertation.

### 3. *Use of sources and/or material*

The author expertly uses all relevant Sanskrit material known to me together with several pertinent sources in Indian vernacular languages and a very broad range of secondary sources, including some of which I was not aware.

### 4. *Personal contribution to the subject*

The author expertly draws on both primary and secondary sources (a) to explain the positions of early scholars on the topic, (b) to show that their claims are not borne out by primary sources, and (c) to present, convincingly, his alternate theory. The majority of the thesis consists of new contributions to scholarship by the author.

## IV. Questions for the author

As I have noted above, the dissertation is complete in itself and in no need of significant changes or corrections to be accepted as a doctoral thesis. I do have various topics that I would like to ask the author about, however, and he may want to consider investigating some of them further, if not in the dissertation, then in its published version. These include:

- (a) The broader historical context. The bulk of the material which introduces the concept of immortality in a material body (and also *ariṣṭāṇi*) dates to the time in which we see the appearance of the haṭhayogic corpus and also the rise to prominence of the concept of *jīvanmukti* (which features widely in texts beyond those of the haṭha corpus). Why does the author think this happens? Why is there so little material on the topic of bodily immortality in earlier texts? E.g. why is there no need to analyse the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*?
- (b) On the above topic, what about the influence of Chinese traditions? The author addresses these in the context of *amṛta* in the skull, but not in other aspects of the subject.
- (c) Does the author think that there is a consensus on the nature of immortality underlying the *haṭha* corpus or were there dissenting voices? What about the following, from page 63? "It is explicitly said [in the NNC] that "no Siddha save Śiva himself possesses true bodily immortality"." Might there be a different attitude to the body in more ascetic traditions as opposed to more householder-oriented ones?
- (d) On p.59 it is said that tantra validates the body more than any other Indian religious tradition. What about *haṭhayoga*, which, much more than tantra, employs the body as a soteriological tool (in fact the only such tool)? Or does the author see that as a branch of tantra?
- (e) Does the Tibetan concept of the "rainbow body" have any relevance to the subject?

- (f) Ditto statements in various texts, in particular the *Amṛtasiddhi*, that the yogi acquires the power of invisibility towards the end of his practice. In the AS (ch.34) the yogi becomes invisible as a result of his ability to bring about the transformation of the gross elements (*mahābhūtapariṇāma*).
- (g) The myths found in at least two hagiographies (the *Līlācaritra* and *Śūnyasaṃpādane*), in which a *siddha* wins a *siddhi* conquest by making his body immaterial, thereby defeating his opponent's adamantine body.
- (h) The notion of *śarīrapakti* taught by Kapila in the *Mahābhārata's Śāntiparvan* (12.262.36) which seems to foreshadow the teachings of the *Yogabīja*.
- (i) The parallels between *cakra* meditation and elemental *dhāraṇā*.

In addition to these subjects, I have some questions about details of the dissertation which I would like to ask the author during the defence.

## V. Conclusion

I have been aware of the author's work on this and other related subjects for many years. The subject of the dissertation was something that had long confused me since I had read the secondary material which the author analyses and found that it did not match what I knew from the primary sources. But I had not made a systematic survey of either the secondary or primary sources and have been waiting for the author to do so. I have not been disappointed. Not only does the thesis systematically and incontrovertibly overturn the inaccurate received understanding of the subject, but it does so in an engaging and highly informative way. It was a pleasure to read.

I provisionally classify the submitted dissertation as passed.

18<sup>th</sup> April 2022

James Mallinson