

Halvor Eifring (ed). *Asian Traditions of Meditation*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016, xv + 254 pp.

Reviewed by Peggy Morgan

This volume began its life as conference papers shared at an Acern Retreat Centre, Oslo, Norway in 2010. It is a collection of twelve essays by eleven different authors and seeks to attempt cross-cultural comparisons. It is the editor Halvor Eifring that addresses this task in the most focused way in his *Introduction* and subsequent two chapters. For example, he acknowledges the difficulty and unsatisfactory nature of distinguishing what is 'Asian' from Judaic, Christian, Islamic and Ancient Greco-Roman traditions of meditation and prayer. The initial two chapters ask *What is Meditation?* and focus on *Types of Meditation* and provide some explicit, critical and useful cross-cultural comparisons with reflections on various alternative methods of doing so which include references to those traditions which lie outside the main brief of the 'Asian' as well as drawing on aspects of the discussions in later chapters of the book.

The chapters then move on to various experienced specialist authors' presentation of 'Hindu' (two chapters) Jaina and Sikh (one chapter each) three chapters on Buddhist and two on indigenous Chinese practices with a final chapter on scientific approaches. There is a more specific focus in the chapters than these broad and contested terms indicate, though we are not told why the authors chose their specific topics as an appropriate contribution to the project as a whole. Edwin F Bryant writes on *Samādhi in the Yoga Sūtras*; Madhu Khanna on *Yantra and Cakra in Tantric Meditation*; Johannes Bronkhorst on the *History of Jaina Meditation*; Kristina Myrvold on *Nām Simran in The Sikh Religion*; Sarah Shaw on *Meditation Objects in Pāli Buddhist Texts*; Geoffrey Samuel on *Tibetan Longevity Meditation*; Morten Schlutter on *Kānhuà Meditation in Chinese Zen*; Harold D. Roth on *Meditation in The Classical Taoist Tradition*; Masaya Mabuchi on *'Quiet Sitting' in Neo-Confucianism*. I suspect that readers

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will go mainly to the specialist and all very interesting chapters which most inform their own research or practice or to extend these out of general interest and in that way I much appreciated the discussions by Shaw and Samuel and Myrvold. The final chapter, which in many ways I found the least well focused and unsatisfactory, is by Hare Holen on *The Science of Meditation*, but perhaps that is the nature of the issues and range of researches involved in this area, not least what we mean by 'science'.

All chapters have informative endnotes, there are glossaries of terms, useful bibliographies and a final index.