

REJUVENATION LONGEVITY IMMORTALITY

PERSPECTIVES ON
RASĀYANA, KĀYAKALPA
AND *BCUD LEN*
PRACTICES

October
21-22
2016

PROGRAM

Anmeldungen unter:
dagmar.wujastyk@univie.ac.at

Rejuvenation, longevity, immortality

Perspectives on rasāyana, kāyakalpa and bcud len practices

October 21-22, 2016

The two-day workshop will explore the historically linked South and Inner Asian practices of rasāyana, kāyakalpa and bcud len. These are practices, treatment techniques and formulations aimed at a variety of goals that range from prolonging life, restoring youthfulness, and promoting physical health, to accessing special powers, achieving enlightenment, and attaining immortality.

Early accounts of such practices are found in Sanskrit medical, alchemical and yoga literature; Tamil Siddha medical literature; and Tibetan Buddhist literature. Variations of these practices are still found as part of South and Inner Asian medicine, yogic techniques and Buddhist practices.

Participants will present historical overviews of these practices in the different disciplines and their literatures, looking for connections (but also disjunctures) between them, and discussing the concepts and aims underlying them. There will also be a practical demonstration of the preparation of traditional ayurvedic iatrochemical tonics.

Program

Friday

Venue: Seminarraum 1, Department of South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, Spitalgasse 2, Hof 2, entrance 2.7, 1090 Vienna

- 9:00 Welcome
- 9:10 **Dagmar Wujastyk** (University of Vienna)
Rasāyana in Sanskrit medical and alchemical literature
- 10:00 **Ilona Kędzia** (Jagiellonian University)
Mastering deathlessness - some remarks about immortality teachings from selected Tamil Siddha texts
- 10:50 tea break
- 11:10 **Claudia Preckel** (Ruhr-University Bochum)
The Elixir of the Body (Iksīr al-badan): Alchemy, rejuvenation and immortality in Unani medicine
- 12:00 **Francis Zimmermann** (EHESS)
Rasāyana today on the market of proprietary medicines
- 12:50 lunch break
- 14:00 **Christèle Barois** (University of Vienna)
Representations of age and life in Sanskrit medieval literature: the concept of vayas
- 14:50 **Philipp A. Maas** (University of Leipzig)
Rasāyana in classical Sāṃkhya-Yoga
- 15:40 tea break
- 16:00 **Jason Birch** (SOAS)
Rejuvenation and herbs in medieval yoga traditions
- 16:50 **Suzanne Newcombe** (Inform, LSE)
Human Hibernation and 185-year-old Sadhus – Claims of life extension and aspirations for immortality in the modern period
- 17:40 Conclusion

Program

Saturday

Venue: The practical demonstration on Saturday, October 22, will take place at the Carl Auer von Welsbach Lecture Hall of the Faculty of Chemistry. Entrance at Boltzmanngasse 1, 1090 Vienna.

9:30 Welcome
9:45 **Andrew Mason** (Netera Publishing)
Demonstration of the preparation of rasāyanas: bhallātaka and rasa parpaṭī

13:00 lunch break

Venue: Saturday afternoon presentations will again take place at Seminarraum 1, Department of South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, Spitalgasse 2, Hof 2.7, 1090 Vienna.

14:30 **Cathy Cantwell** (University of Oxford)
Reflections on bcud len and related practices in Nyingma (rnying ma) tantric ritual

15:20 **Barbara Gerke** (University of Vienna)
Mercury as a bcud len in Tibetan medical traditions

16:10 tea break

16:30-17:30 Concluding session

Abstracts

Rasāyana in Sanskrit medical and alchemical literature

Dagmar Wujastyk, University of Vienna

In Sanskrit medical literature, the term “*rasāyana*” is used to describe a sub-discipline of medicine; the therapies that together constitute this sub-discipline; and finally, the medical formulations used in these therapies. Broadly speaking, *rasāyana* therapies and medicines are meant to prolong life, restore youthfulness and promote physical health and mental acuity, and the formulations could therefore perhaps be generally termed “tonics”. However, some *rasāyana* formulations are presented as medicines for specific diseases rather than as general tonics, while other formulations serve as good luck charms or are described as producing supernatural results such as the ability to fly.

Matters are complicated further by the usage of the term „*rasāyana*“ to describe the Indian alchemical tradition. In Sanskrit alchemical literature, the term appears in different contexts: First, it is used to describe substances and formulations that are similar to those found in medical works. Second, it describes the key practices of Indian alchemy, namely the processes of preparing mercurial elixirs of immortality and the methods of their intake by the alchemical practitioner. However, even in the latter context, we find echoes of the older medical methods and applications.

In my presentation, I will attempt to shed some light on the multi-layered history of *rasāyana* as a branch of Indian medicine and as a part of Indian alchemy. I will explore what *rasāyana* was used for and for whom it was used, highlighting central recurring themes and the most striking divergences.

Mastering deathlessness - some remarks about immortality teachings from selected Tamil Siddha texts

Ilona Kedzia, Jagiellonian University, Poland

My presentation will discuss practices, along with the underlying theory, aimed at achieving longevity and immortality described in Tamil Siddha literature, with special focus on the medical stream of the Tamil Siddha tradition. The lecture will be divided into three main parts. The first part will be devoted to the ideas described in the *Tirumantiram* of Tirumūlar (5-6 century C.E.), a generally acknowledged root text of the Tamil Siddha tradition, including the medical schools. The *Tirumantiram* contains passages that elaborately discuss theory and practices of yoga, which are viewed as a way to attain longevity and immortality. However, references to medical practices can also be found in the text. The second part will present the methods of achieving rejuvenation and immortality found in selected medical and alchemical texts of the tradition. Literature of the medical and alchemical lore of the Tamil Siddhas, roughly dated to the period between the 16th and 19th centuries, abounds in practical recipes for the *kāyakaṛpam* drugs for prolonging life. Medical therapies, substances and methods of preparation will be discussed. Items credited with extraordinary powers such as *muppu* ('triple salt'), *kuru* ('excellence'), *racamaṇi* ('mercurial jewel'), special species of plants, etc. will be particularly referenced. Samples of some mineral and herbal substances used nowadays by the traditional Siddha doctors will be demonstrated along with the photos illustrating *kāyakaṛpam* drug processing. The last part of the presentation will concern 'the art of deathlessness' (*cākākkalai*) taught in the works of Vaḷḷalār, the poet-saint born in 1823, closely linked with the Siddha tradition. Vaḷḷalār is reported to have disappeared in 1874 and it is generally believed that he has attained the deathless state due to the transformation of the body. A cult of the poet is nowadays prevalent in Vadalur and nearby towns in Tamilnadu.

The Elixir of the Body (Iksīr al-badan): Alchemy, Rejuvenation and Immortality in Unani Medicine

Claudia Preckel, Ruhr-University Bochum (Germany)

Unani Medicine, *Ṭibb-e yūnānī*, or simply *ṭibb*, is a South Asian holistic medical tradition based on the humoral theories from Ancient Greece. It might be translated as Graeco-Islamic Medicine. As humoral medicine spread from Greece and Rome to the Arabic countries and from there into the whole Islamic world (including South Asia), Unani Medicine claims to be based on Greek medicine, but to have gained perfection with the teachings of Arabic, Persian and South Asian (Muslim) scholars. Unani Medicine also knows many drugs of herbal, animal or mineral origin, which allegedly have effects of rejuvenation of the body or strengthening it, e.g. asparagus or delphinium. There are further calcinations (*kuṣṭajāt*) of metals (gold, silver, mercury), gems (diamonds, jade) or animal products (eggs, crabs), which are said to have the same effects. Practitioners of Unani Medicine, the *ḥakīms*, stress the existence of a substance called *Iksīr albadan* in Urdu and Arabic, literally "elixir of the body". The term *al-iksīr*, elixir, is derived from the Arabic language – as the term "alchemy" is derived from the Arabic *al-kīmīyā'*. Some authors claim that "alchemy is the art of Kimiya or the art of elixir, as these words are synonyms" (Mahdihassan:1981, 65). Undoubtedly the teachings of the *iksīr* are closely linked to the Greek theories, but it is quite necessary to analyse the terms and the change of their meanings during the process of translation from Greek to Arabic, Persian and Urdu.

The paper will introduce some Arabic sources on the subjects of alchemy/elixir and will discuss the question if *kīmīyā'/iksīr/* water of life (*āb-e ḥayāt*), *rasa* and other terms are used as synonyms in Unani medical writings. Additionally, some drugs from Unani Medicine, which are supposed to have rejuvenating/strengthening characteristics are shown.

Bibliography:

- Amritsarī, Ḥakīm Muḥammad Ismā'īl. 2011. *Kilīd-e kīmīyā'*. Na'ī Dehlī: I'jāz Publishing Ha'ūs.
- Mahdihassan, S. 1981. "Alchemy and its fundamental terms in Greek, Arabic, Sanskrit and Chinese". *Indian Journal for the History of Science* 16 i, (May 1981): 64-76.
- Preckel, Claudia. 2015. "Cinnabar, Calomel and the Art of kuṣṭasāzī: Mercurial Preparations in Unani Medicine". *Asiatische Studien* 69 iv (Dez. 2015): 901-932.

Rasāyana today on the market of proprietary medicines

Francis Zimmermann, EHES, Paris

Conversant with the Ayurvedic flora medica and compound medicines which were standardized at the national level in the official *Ayurvedic Formulary of India* published in 1978, I have been part of an international team of historians, economists and anthropologists working on the pharmaceutical industry in South, South-East and East Asia, and I am studying a few hundred pharmaceuticals which are produced industrially in India, by companies like The Himalaya Drug Co (recently renamed as Himalaya Wellness) for instance, and marketed as proprietary medicines although they are inspired by traditional Sanskrit formulas.

A number of these pharmaceuticals are conceived of as specific medicinal products for rejuvenation, whether they are advertised as such or not. The most well-known example is Chyawanprash. A study of its botanical and textual sources and a comparison of its numerous commercial variants may provide an insight into the most classical aspect of contemporary rejuvenation practices. At the other end of the spectrum, however, we do find proprietary medicines specifically meant for rejuvenation but which are not advertised as such. The values and practices of rejuvenation and long life have been medicalized and pharmaceuticalized, so to say, so that they can be purchased and consumed as commodities. A good example is Menosan, produced by Himalaya Wellness and exclusively meant for ladies and the management of menopause. Essentially based on *śatāvarī* (*Asparagus racemosus*), a famous *medhyarasāyana* herb, Menosan is actually a rejuvenating formula, although women have replaced men as prime targets of treatment in its underlying Ayurvedic rationale.

Commenting upon documents circulated in advance and images projected on the screen, I would attempt to compare a dozen significant *rasāyana* products like the above-mentioned ones currently on the market, to highlight the key role of a few herbal ingredients, and to put back the flora medica involved in the larger context of philosophical relationships between ideas of blossoming and long life and herbs and the vegetable kingdom.

Representations of age and life: the concept of vayas

Christele Barois, University of Vienna

The representation of the process of human life is at the heart of questions about longevity, rejuvenation practices and possibly those which aim at immortality. The key term for “age” in medieval India is *vayas*, which means “vigour”, “youth” or even “any period of life”, that is to say exactly the same meaning as ours (duration of life). As a criterion for the examination of the patient, *vayas* is invariably divided into three periods: childhood, intermediate age and old age, precisely defined in the ayurvedic *saṃhitās*. This threefold characterization of the process of life is also found in other contexts, in particular alchemy and yoga. So it seems that *vayas* might be a relevant gateway to the cross-disciplinary understandings of age in medieval India, and therefore to the terms of its (relative) mastery.

Rasāyana in classical Sāṅkhya-Yoga

Philipp A. Maas, University of Leipzig

Classical Sāṅkhya-Yoga is a strongly soteriologically orientated premodern South Asian system of knowledge, which in the early 5th c. CE appears fully developed in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* (PYŚ). According to this work, the world consists of two fundamentally different kinds of entities. On the one hand there exists an infinite number of transcendental “selves,” who are conceived as pure inactive and unchangeable consciousness, bare of any content. Besides the selves, the world consists of the products of primordial matter, which is completely unconscious, active and changeable. The products of matter not only make up all things of the outside world, but in human beings they also fashion the sense-capacities as well as the mental capacity which is most frequently called *citta*. Mental processes are thought to depend upon the existence—and as it were “interaction”—of both kinds of entities. The mental capacity supplies the content of a mental process to the self, which by “seeing” it “provides” the mental content with consciousness. Everyday experience, of course, contradicts this analysis, because we neither experience consciousness without content, nor do we experience content without consciousness. According to Sāṅkhya-Yoga, however, the analysis of mental processes in every day experience as being of a uniform nature is wrong. It is caused by nescience, which deludes the self about its own ontological status. The self—pure consciousness—is attracted by the mental capacity like iron is attracted by a lodestone. The self becomes erroneously convinced to be affected by the content of experience. It feels happiness and suffers pain, although these, as well as all other kinds of mental events, exclusively take place within the mental capacity. In reality, the self, due to its peculiar ontological status, is incapable of being anything else than it is, viz. pure, contentless, and unchanging consciousness. The aim of Sāṅkhya Yoga in its soteriological dimension is to end the wrong identification of the self with its mental capacity once and for all, which amounts for the practicing yogi to the final liberation from the cycle of rebirths and its innate suffering. The means to this end is the realization of the ontological difference between the self and matter in meditative absorption, which is called “knowledge of the difference.” Due to its strong soteriological orientation, classical Sāṅkhya-Yoga apparently does not leave much room for the perusal of life extending practices like *rasāyana*. Nevertheless, *rasāyana* practices are mentioned at two instances of the PYŚ, namely in PYŚ 3.51 in the context of the encounter of advanced yogins with heavenly being, and in PYŚ 4.1 with regard to superhuman abilities resulting from herbal substances. The presentation analyses these two text passages in their respective contexts by taking into consideration different interpretations of mediaeval yoga commentators. Moreover, it compares the attitudes towards *rasāyana* as reflected in the PYŚ with Upaniṣadic, epic, and early āyurvedic notions of life extending practices in order to arrive at a novel understanding of the complicated relationship between spiritual liberation and life extension as legitimate aims of human pursuits in premodern South Asia.

Rejuvenation and herbs in medieval Yoga traditions

Jason Birch, SOAS, Haṭha Yoga project

References to rejuvenation, longevity and immortality are scattered throughout medieval yoga texts. This paper will examine how these themes were integrated with the general aims of these yoga traditions. In particular, passages on the use of herbs will be presented with a view to asking whether these texts corroborate medieval traveler's reports of yogins resorting to the use of elixirs for longevity.

Human Hibernation and 185-year-old Sadhus – Claims of life extension and aspirations for immortality in the modern period

Suzanne Newcombe (Inform, LSE)

In the modern period, the potentials for human life extension and techniques for the rejuvenation of the physical body have seen a keen and continuing interest. This discussion explore some of the historically documented cases where Indian techniques for longevity and 'life suspension' including the well-known Shriman Tapasviji (died in 1955) and Devraha Baba (died 1990). Through comparative context, I will consider the meaning of immortality and extreme life claims in hagiography and explore the methods claimed for how life extension was achieved. I will argue that language and practices relating to immortality may emphasize a transformation of consciousness in which a sense of timelessness and ego-less-ness is dominant and where the idea of a mortal "I" becomes irrelevant. Also relevant in this context are claims of the transcendence of pain, and ability of yogis to suspend life-functions at will as evidence of spiritual attainment. It will be suggested that this interpretive framework, analogous to 'healing' as opposed to 'cure' that has been discussed in other contexts. This kind of framework may be helpful in understanding Swami Ramdev (amongst others) when he says 'with utmost sincerity, experience and scientific inferences we wish to state that for 99% of diseases, we have a permanent and perfect solution in Ayurveda' (2012, p. i).

Bibliography:

- Chakraborty, C. 2006. „Ramdev and Somatic Nationalism: Embodying the Nation, Desiring the Global.“ *Economic and Political Weekly* 41 (5): 387-390.
- 2007. „The Hindu Ascetic as Fitness Instructor: Reviving Faith in Yoga.“ *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 24 (9): 1172-1186.
- Nanda, M. 2006. „How Modern Are We? Cultural Contradictions of India's Modernity.“ *Economic & Political Weekly* 41 (6): 491-496.
- NDTV. 2011. *Ramdev vs. Government Escalates, Both Say Trust Betrayed*. Updated 04 June. Accessed 4 May 2012. <http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/ramdev-vs-governmentescalates-both-say-trust-betrayed-110158>.
- 2012. *Ramlila Crackdown: Supreme Court Slams Govt, Delhi Police; also Pulls Up Ramdev*. Updated 23 February. Accessed 26 March 2012. <http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/ramlila-crackdown-supreme-court-slamsgovtdelhi-police-also-pulls-up-ramdev-179184>.

***Reflections on rasāyana, bcud len and related practices in Nyingma
(rnying ma) tantric ritual***

Cathy Cantwell, Oxford University

The Tibetan term, *bcud len*, "imbibing the essence juice", is an equivalent for Sanskrit, *rasāyana*, but in Tibetan Buddhist ritual manuals, both terms occur, apparently with slightly different connotations. Practices classified as *bcud len* are frequently relatively short, and seem primarily designed for the use of individual yogis, usually as a subsidiary practice to complement their main tantric meditation. The production of *bcud len* pills which are said to sustain, rejuvenate and extend the life of the body, or even to bring immortality, is often an integral part of the practice. The term, *rasāyana*, is used in Tibetan transliteration (*ra sā ya na*), not as a title or classification for a specific ritual practice or recipe for pills, but rather to refer to the processes of alchemical transformation of substances within complex ritual "medicinal accomplishment" (*sman sgrub*) performances which are generally communal. In this case too, pills are produced, of the broader "sacred elixir dharma medicine" (*dam rdzas bdud rtsi chos sman*) type. This paper will consider a range of the practices, and of substances used in the sacred medicinal compounds.

Mercury as a chülen in Tibetan traditions

Barbara Gerke, University of Vienna

The Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit *rasāyana* ('the coming forth by itself [*āyana*] of the fluid essence [*rasa*'];) is quite a literal one: *chülen* (*bcud len*, lit. 'bringing forth *chü*'). *Chü* can refer to a variety of things (e.g. taste, essence, moisture, nutrition, a good substance, distilled essence, or a drink), which are not necessarily medical in nature nor do they have the attributes of specifically 'life-enhancing' qualities, which have been frequently attached to *chülen* substances. This presentation explores the question how 'rejuvenation' as a life-enhancing (*tshé grub*) attribute to a substance evolved in Tibetan medical texts over time. Taking the example of mercury (*dngul chu*) and its use in the *Four Treatises* (*Rgyud bzhi*), its commentaries, and selected *chülen* recipes, I explore when, where, and how did mercury become a *chülen* and receive attributes of longevity as a life-enhancing elixir.

There are hundreds of *chülen* recipes across Tibetan literature, classified in various ways. Seventythree *chülen* texts were recently analyzed by Jamyang Oliphant (2016), of which only four texts list mercury as an ingredient for longevity-enhancing *chülen*. This finding, despite its limitations, is interesting when analysed together with the position of mercury in the *Four Treatises* and related commentaries. Early on, processed mercury is not presented as an elixir or *chülen* as such; it becomes a 'rejuvenating' substance by the seventeenth century. How can we understand this development in the context of the early Buddhist Nyingma ritual material on mercury, where taking *rasāyana* is linked to developing supernatural powers (*siddhi*), but is also an important part of communal 'medicinal accomplishment' rites called *mendrup* (*sman sgrub*).

Organisation:

Dr. Dagmar Wujastyk
Department of South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies
University of Vienna

Spitalgasse 2, Hof 2.1/2.7
1090 Vienna

T: +43-1-4277 43501

F: +43-1-4277 9435

istb@univie.ac.at

stb.univie.ac.at



in cooperation with the

European Research Council

