

# WELL-ASIA Kick-Off Workshop

*Wellbeing in a Capitalist World: Embodiment,  
Spirituality, and Mobilities*

Thursday 9 April & Friday 10 April

Location: Spiegelzaal (GG80-82 1.003), Grote Gracht 80-82



WELL-ASIA explores the rise of the commercial wellness industry in Southeast Asia. Focusing on Singapore, Chiang Mai, and Ubud, our ethnographically-centred project adopts a multidimensional focus on the transnational encounters and inequalities between those who labour in the industry, those who seek and consume wellness experiences, and the local communities involved. It seeks to understand how global ideas of wellness are locally reshaped—highlighting both the creative possibilities that emerge in the pursuit of wellness and the often unseen social, economic and cultural implications on local economies, mobilities and livelihoods.

This inaugural workshop of the 'WELL-ASIA' project brings together scholars broadly working on themes relating to wellness within Asia and in other regional contexts: from medical anthropology and the commodification of health and medical travel, to embodied practices and the labour of wellness and hospitality workers, tourist and lifestyle mobilities, and wider questions relating to spiritual and planetary wellbeing. We aim to collectively understand what it means to live well in today's highly mobile and capitalist context, what is distinctive about the expansion of a wellness industry and its practices in this particular moment in time, and how it relates to historically-rooted healing practices and mobilities across borders; and experiences that are not reduced to market logics.

# Programme

April 9

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**10:00 - 10:40**

**Welcome and Introduction:** WELL-ASIA research team (Megha Amrith, Kristel Acedera, Hanum Atikasari and Karlien Strijbosch)

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**10: 40 - 11:40**

**Panel 1: Health industries and alternative medicine**

The Identity Politics of an Asian Health Industry: Tibetan medicine between nation building and nation branding  
[Stephan Kloos \(Institute for Social Anthropology, Austrian Academy of Sciences\)](#)

From Colgate to Patanjali: Ayurvedic Industry and Well-being in Contemporary India  
[Venera Khalikova \(Chinese University of Hong Kong\)](#)

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**11:40 - 12:00**

Coffee Break

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**12:00 - 13:00**

**Panel 2: Embodied practices: individual, national, and global perspectives**

The Yoga Research Institute Kaivalyadhama: Critical Perspectives on Spiritual Commodities and Wellness Nationalism in India  
[Anna Krämer \(University of Cologne\)](#)

Muscular Aspirations: Male Wellness, Industry, and the Body in Urban India  
[Michiel Baas \(Leiden University\)](#)

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**13:00 - 14:00**

Lunch

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### Panel 3: Wellness Labour

Aging Thai Health and Wellness Workers through the Lens of Care and Intersectionality

[Sirijit Sunanta \(Mahidol University\)](#)

**14:00 - 15:30**

Ayurveda and Wellness: The Shifting Professional Identities of Female Keralite Ayurveda Therapists to Malaysia

[Nirmala Arath Prabhakar \(Monash University Malaysia\)](#)

Racial Capital, Racial Capitalism and Wellness Industry: Experience of Northeast Women in the Spa Industry in India

[Salah Punathil \(University of Hyderabad\)](#)

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**15:30 - 15:45**

Coffee break

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**15:45 - 17:15**

Breakout session: sharing experiences on methods, ethics, and collaborations

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**April 10**



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### Panel 4: Spirituality, Wellbeing, and Affect

Beyond the Marketplace: Spirituality, Wellbeing, and the Ambivalences of Care

[Mar Griera \(Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona\)](#)

**9:30 - 11:00**

Trauma of the Sea: Coastal *Dosham*, Erosion and Cyclical Injury in Kerala, South India

[Claudia Lang \(Maastricht University\)](#)

Cultivating Spiritual Wellness through Veganism

[Loretta Lou \(Durham University\)](#)

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**11:00 - 11:20** Coffee Break

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**Panel 5: Travel and tourist mobilities: health and lifestyle**

**11:20 - 12:20** Medical and Health Mobilities as Moral Economies: Care, Labor and Deservingness in Southeast Asia  
[Meghann Ormond \(Wageningen University\)](#)

Digital nomadism as lifestyle mobility: conceptual and empirical developments  
[Olga Hannonen \(University of Eastern Finland\)](#)

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**12:20 - 13:00** Workshop closing

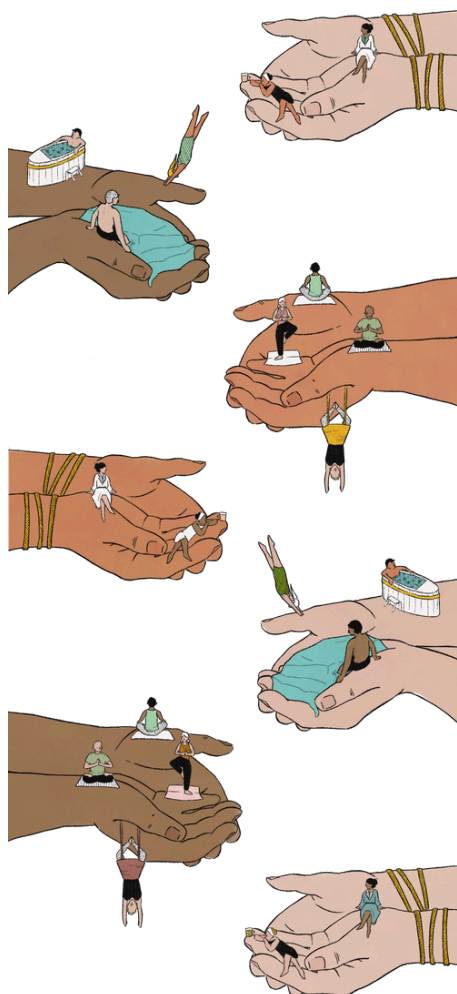
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**13:00 - 14:00** Lunch

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**(Optional)** Informal Explorations of Maastricht, for anyone interested

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# Abstracts & Bios

\*in order of presentation

## **The Identity Politics of an Asian Health Industry: Tibetan medicine between nation building and nation branding**

Stephan Kloos (Institute for Social Anthropology, Austrian Academy of Sciences)

Over the past two decades, Tibetan medicine (Sowa Rigpa) has grown into a global industry worth nearly 1.8 billion USD, transforming it from a cultural symbol into a contested economic and political resource. This paper examines what happens to the politics of Asian health traditions when they become industries, using Sowa Rigpa as a case study. Drawing on theories of nation branding and cultural alienation, I argue that industrialization has made Sowa Rigpa detachable from its Tibetan cultural roots, enabling other nations – most notably India, which officially recognized it as an "Indian medical system" in 2010 – to appropriate it for their own nationalist agendas. This process represents a fundamental shift: whereas Asian medical traditions once served 20th-century nation *building* by anchoring collective identity, they now serve 21st-century nation *branding* by functioning as competitive global commodities. Rather than rendering these traditions apolitical, however, this shift simply changes their political register. If the nation becomes a brand, then the economics of the brand doubles as a politics of nationalism. For Tibetans, navigating this landscape requires actively reconstructing Sowa Rigpa's identity within marketplace logic, while continuing to resist giving up its Buddhist ethics to capitalist profit maximization.

**Stephan Kloos** is deputy director of the Austrian Academy of Sciences' (ÖAW) Institute for Social Anthropology. His research explores the development and sociocultural, political, economic, and environmental consequences of Asian health industries, with a particular focus on Sowa Rigpa (Tibetan, Mongolian, and Himalayan medicine). Besides publishing the first qualitative and quantitative assessment of the transnational Sowa Rigpa industry in Asia, he has developed the concepts of "pharmaceutical assemblage" and "humanitarianism from below". Stephan is the co-editor of two books, *Healing at the Periphery* (Duke 2022) and *Asian Medical Industries* (Routledge 2022), and his publications can be freely accessed at [www.stephankloos.org](http://www.stephankloos.org).

# Abstracts & Bios

## **From Colgate to Patanjali: Ayurvedic Industry and Well-belonging in Contemporary India**

Venera Khalikova (Chinese University of Hong Kong)

“Earlier we used to buy Colgate toothpaste, but now we use local, our own products, even toothpaste. In every house, in every family, you will find Ramdev’s products”—these were the words of a resident of a North Indian town, who pointed to the everyday influence of Ayurvedic products produced by the Patanjali Ayurved Limited, spearheaded by yoga guru Ramdev. Before Patanjali’s entrance, multinational companies like Colgate had dominated the oral healthcare market but Patanjali’s success with innovative packaging, advertising, and nationalist rhetoric compelled those companies to introduce their herbal product lines. In this talk, I demonstrate that rather than being “traditional medicine,” Ayurveda also exists as a highly innovative, brand-oriented, and transnational industry. Taking Patanjali Ayurved as a key player in this transformation, I examine how Ayurveda extends beyond pharmaceuticals and impacts local and global companies. Thus, the emphasis on a locally-based wellness industry reframes Ayurveda as a proactive, trend-setting force rather than an Asian practice passively impacted by globalization. I further propose the concept of “well-belonging” to demonstrate how corporate Ayurveda successfully bridges the contemporary narratives of health and identity, bolstered by Hindu nationalist ideology. This allows Indians to align their consumption choices with both the aspirations for well-being and cultural belonging.

**Venera Khalikova:** As a cultural anthropologist, I am interested in the experiences of cultural difference and belonging in two distinct contexts: transnational migration to Hong Kong and alternative medicine in India. In my book project, I explore the hierarchical divisions and mutual entanglements among India's alternative medical systems such as ayurveda, unani, yoga, and homeopathy. My new project explores the intersectionality and conditionality of privilege among highly-skilled women of South Asian heritage in Hong Kong.

# Abstracts & Bios

## **The Yoga Research Institute Kaivalyadhama: Critical Perspectives on Spiritual Commodities and Wellness Nationalism in India**

[Anna Krämer \(University of Cologne\)](#)

Over recent decades, yoga as physical exercise, spiritual practice, and lifestyle has spread across urban, cosmopolitan worlds, producing new forms of professionalisation, therapeutic trainings, wellness programs, and global consumption practices. In parallel, the Indian government promotes yoga as a universal public good for health and wellbeing and, particularly since the tenure of Narendra Modi, has embedded it in regulatory frameworks, educational curricula, and state-led spiritual branding initiatives. This paper asks how yoga is negotiated, standardized, and circulated as a spiritual commodity, and how institutional regulation, political agendas, and global market dynamics contribute to the emergence of wellness nationalism in contemporary India. Based on multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork conducted in India between 2023 and 2024, the study centres on Kaivalyadhama, the world's oldest yoga research institute, which positions itself at the intersection of scientific knowledge production, professional training, and residential wellness programmes. Healing-oriented programs such as Yoga & Relaxation, Yoga & Anti-aging as well as specialized formats for cancer survivors and lifestyle diseases are determined and resonate strongly with the demands of the global health market. The paper foregrounds situated practices of conceptualizing yoga within institutional settings, focusing on how standardization processes, certification regimes, and identity politics together shape contemporary articulations of yoga.

**Anna Krämer** is a doctoral researcher and associate member of the German Research Foundation Training Group 2661 "anschießen - ausschließen: Cultural Dynamics Beyond Globalized Networks" at the University of Cologne, Germany. In her PhD project "In the Shadow of Global Yoga", she investigates how globalized forms of yoga are renegotiated, represented, and recontextualized in situated practices in India. The project builds on previous ethnographic fieldwork among followers of a contemporary Guru in Rishikesh, India, conducted as part of her MA thesis, focusing on perceptions and practices of spirituality. Her research interests include Anthropology of Religion, Media and Yoga Studies, New Spiritual Movements, Communities of Practice and practices of religious materiality and embodiment. Her PhD research is funded by the Hans Böckler Foundation.

# Abstracts & Bios

## **Muscular Aspirations: Male Wellness, Industry, and the Body in Urban India**

[Michiel Baas \(Leiden University\)](#)

This paper draws on a decade of ethnographic engagement with bodybuilders, gym instructors, and personal trainers in urban India to examine the emergence of a rapidly expanding field of male wellness, grooming, and bodily self-fashioning. Since the early 2010s, Indian cities have witnessed a striking proliferation of gyms, supplement stores, and fitness services catering to a growing middle class increasingly invested in cultivating the body as a site of discipline, aspiration, and visibility. While these developments are often framed in terms of health or lifestyle improvement, they also reflect the consolidation of a broader fitness industry that links bodily transformation to consumption, professional expertise, and new forms of service labour. Building on long-term fieldwork among fitness professionals, the paper traces how male bodily practices—ranging from bodybuilding and weight training to personalized coaching and dietary regimes—have become embedded in expanding commercial infrastructures of wellness. At the same time, the paper highlights how those who labour within this industry understand and negotiate their own bodies as both personal projects and professional assets. Bringing these observations together, the paper explores the dialectical relationship between body, society, and industry in contemporary urban India. It argues that the cultivation of muscularity and fitness cannot be understood simply as an individual pursuit of wellbeing, but must be situated within a broader socio-economic landscape in which bodies, aspirations, and markets are increasingly intertwined.

**Michiel Baas** is an Anthropologist and Writer. He has published extensively in the field of gender, sexuality and the body with a specific focus on urban India. His most recent book was *Muscular India: Masculinity, Mobility and the New Middle Class* (Context, 2020). After his PhD with the University of Amsterdam (2009) he was a senior research fellow with the Asia Research Institute of the National University of Singapore, and the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Germany. He has also worked and published in the field of migration and transnationalism studies and, more recently, contributed to the development to an anthropological approach to AI.

# Abstracts & Bios

## **Aging Thai Health and Wellness Workers through the Lens of Care and Intersectionality**

Sirijit Sunanta (Mahidol University)

Intersectionality and care are both prominent frameworks within feminist migration scholarship. Intersectionality disrupts the homogeneity of social categories, underscoring multiple social axes of power that shape the complexity and multiplicity of privilege and marginalization. The concept of care, particularly the global care chain, has been criticized for its Eurocentrism and heteronormative tendencies. This chapter brings together the intersectionality framework and the global care chain concept in a study of workers in the lower rung of Thailand's health and wellness industry. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Hua Hin, a destination both for health and wellness tourism and international retirement migration, I present voices of an older Thai masseuse and a Thai gay man caregiver who works in a private nursing home. The presentation illustrates the ways in which those who are multiply marginalized in the Global South interpret care-giving, care receiving, and care entitlement. It highlights the importance of studying care and intersectionality in non-Western contexts while simultaneously problematizing the North/South binary and the view of non-Western places and peoples as homogeneous and unchanging.

**Sirijit Sunanta** is an Associate Professor and Chairperson of the PhD Program in Multicultural Studies at the Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia (RILCA), Mahidol University, Thailand. Her research interests encompass gender and migration, globalization and food cultures, and the politics of diversity. She has studied transnational mobilities between Europe and Thailand extensively, publishing widely in leading journals across Asian Studies, Migration, Gender, and Tourism Studies. Her current research focuses on care transnationalization, gendered labor in the Thai tourism industry, and masculinity and the sociology of migrant belonging.

# Abstracts & Bios

## **Ayurveda and Wellness: The Shifting Professional Identities of Female Keralite Ayurveda Therapists to Malaysia**

[Nirmala Arath Prabhakar \(Monash University Malaysia\)](#)

Ayurveda is an ancient system of medicine indigenous to parts of South Asia and expanding globally. In India, the modernisation of Ayurveda has led to the institutionalisation of Ayurveda training and the professionalisation of such practices, towards a scientific paradigm. This presentation focuses on the transnational labour migration experiences of female Ayurveda therapists or assistant practitioners from the state of Kerala, India, to Malaysia. Such labour (im)mobilities take place in a changing, increasingly regulated traditional medicine sector in Malaysia, which intersects with Ayurveda's evolution in India. Through fieldwork, document analysis, and archival research, this presentation highlights how, alongside navigating their transition from less-skilled workers to expatriate workers in Malaysia, female Keralite Ayurveda therapists navigate the influence of the wellness agenda on their work and future employment prospects. Such influence requires female Keralite Ayurveda therapists to adapt to varying understandings of care, and exposes the fluid but contested boundaries between health and wellness. These women attempt to undertake relevant strategies, formal and informal, related to training and professional competency requirements and to build capitals for current and future work. However, they negotiate these strategies alongside the barriers they face, including social stratification and socio-cultural perceptions of feminine respectability.

**Nirmala Arath Prabhakar** recently completed her PhD in migration studies at Monash University Malaysia as a part-time candidate. Whilst at Monash, she was also a team member of the research project on Lifestyle Im/Mobilities in/to Malaysia in the Covid-19 era- A Pilot Study, and a sessional tutor for the unit Borders, People, and Identity: Migration in the 21st Century. Nirmala presently leads the corporate social responsibility strategy of a private company, currently focused on improving access to education. Ongoing projects include learning support for students from several refugee communities in the Klang Valley. In addition to experience in the private and academic sectors, Nirmala has volunteered with several civil society organisations in Malaysia that support foreign workers and students from disadvantaged communities, respectively.

# Abstracts & Bios

## **Racial Capital, Racial Capitalism and Wellness Industry: Experience of Northeast Women in the Spa Industry in India**

Salah Punathil (University of Hyderabad)

In this paper, I show how concepts of racial capital and racial capitalism emerge as interconnected and simultaneous processes resulting in paradoxical experiences in the wellness industry in a South Asian context. There has been a large-scale migration of population from Northeastern states to India's metropolitan cities and other regions in the past two decades under neo-economic policies. While this demonstrates social and economic mobility, recent literature has shown that such movements have also produced racial discrimination, labour exploitation, hostility and violence against perceived 'others' from Northeast India. Building on this literature, the paper explores how race, sexuality and labour intersect in wellness industries, especially in spa centres. The increasing demand for Northeastern women, especially those hailing from hill tribes, in the spa industry shows how racial capital translates into racial worth, helping them advance their careers and resulting in their relative upward class progression. On the other hand, ethnographic insights reveal exploitation in the form of lower wages, prolonged working hours and work stress inherent to this affective labour field. Stories from the field also reveal various forms of sexual violence ranging from sexual advances of clients and spa owners in the everyday setting of workspace to organised sexual trafficking under the pretext of spa centres. The paper argues that there is a 'Southeasternised', sexualised and racialised identity in leisure industries such as spas that are simultaneously enabling and challenging for labour subjects, operative not only in India or in the Asian scenario but around the globe. The valuation and devaluation of racial capital and consequent human experience is heavily contingent on how race intersects with other categories such as class, gender, geographical location and the field of labour in which raciality operates in the neo-liberal world.

# Abstracts & Bios

**Salah Punathil** is a Sociologist and teaches at the Centre for Regional Studies, University of Hyderabad, India. His research interests include ethnic violence, migration and borderlands, race and citizenship, minorities in South Asia and the intersection of archives and ethnography. He has done his Post-Doctoral Fellowship (2018-2020) at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Gottingen, Germany. He was a DAAD Guest Professor at CeMIS, University of Gottingen from 1 November 2023 to 31 January 2024. He was visiting fellow at the Max Planck Institute, Gottingen from 1 August 2024 to 30 August 2024. His book 'Interrogating Communalism: Violence, Citizenship and Minorities in South India' is published by Routledge in 2019. He has published articles in journals such as Citizenship Studies, History and Anthropology, Third World Quarterly, Asian Ethnicity, Migration Politics, South Asia Research and Contributions to Indian Sociology. His edited book 'Lines and Passages: Reimagining Migration and Borderlands in South Asia' (Routledge) will be released in March, 2026. He is a recipient of the M. N. Srinivas Award for Young Indian Sociologists in 2015 and the Chancellor's Award for Best Faculty at the University of Hyderabad.

# Abstracts & Bios

## **Beyond the Marketplace: Spirituality, Wellbeing, and the Ambivalences of Care**

Mar Grieria (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona)

This paper examines contemporary spirituality beyond two familiar readings: as commodified wellness and as individualized self-making. It approaches spirituality instead as a site of boundary-making, a social space where the lines between religion and secularity, or between science and experience, are actively negotiated. Seen from this angle, spirituality is not simply a cultural supplement to wellbeing, but one of the primary terrains where the meanings of health and authority are being reworked through new practices of care.

The argument draws on ethnographic work in Catalonia and Uruguay, as well as on previous research on spirituality in healthcare settings. Across these sites, spirituality emerges not just as a set of beliefs, but as a framework for interpreting suffering that connects bodily vulnerability with broader environmental concerns. In particular, narratives of toxicity and healing show how wellbeing can be framed at once as an intimate and planetary concern. By doing so, these spiritualities often complicate the commercial circuits of the wellness industry, proposing alternative scales of value that exceed the logic of the marketplace.

At the same time, this does not place spirituality outside capitalism. The same repertoires that sustain ecological critique or alternative forms of care can also feed forms of epistemic rupture, distrust in institutions, and neoliberal responsabilization. I argue, therefore, that spirituality is best understood as a contested field in which struggles over wellbeing exceed both the marketplace and the individualized self, unfolding instead at the junction where moral life confronts the shifting boundaries of care and institutional authority.

**Mar Grieria** is Full Professor of Sociology at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and Director of ISOR, the research centre for the study of religion. Her research focuses on religion, spirituality, religious diversity, and politics in contemporary Europe. She has led several research projects and has been a visiting scholar at institutions including the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris, the Université de Lausanne, and Boston University.

# Abstracts & Bios

## Trauma of the Sea: Coastal *Dosham*, Erosion and Cyclical Injury in Kerala, South India

Claudia Lang (Maastricht University)

Chellanam is among the areas of Kerala that are most severely affected by coastal erosion and flooding. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Chellanam, I trace lived experiences of coastal erosion. I explore how coastal transformations map onto physiological and psychological states in one of Kerala's most vulnerable communities and address these entangled ecological and psycho-physiological coastal erosions as wounds invoked by the local term, coastal *dosham*. An Ayurvedic and local imagination of shared trauma, this helps to carve out what it means to think with flows, blockages and imbalances about the multiple interlocking relations of people, minds, bodies and ecologies under conditions of coastal erosion. In doing so, I contribute to the anthropology of coastal erosion and the anthropology of ecological distress.

**Claudia Lang** is an Associate Professor of Anthropology and Health at Maastricht University. Her research focuses on mental health, digitization, ecological distress, planetary health, and traditional medicine, primarily in India. In one current research project, she focuses on digital mental health innovations in and from India. In another current research, she uses the lens of ecological grief to think about 'environ-mental health'. Claudia is author of *Depression in Kerala. Ayurveda and mental health care in the 21st century* (Routledge, 2018) and a co-author of *Global Health for All: Knowledge, Politics, and Practices* (Rutgers, 2022), and of *The Movement for Global Mental Health: Critical Views from South and Southeast Asia* (Amsterdam University Press, 2021).

# Abstracts & Bios

## Cultivating Spiritual Wellness through Veganism

Loretta Lou (Durham University)

Veganism and plant-based diets are often discussed in relation to environmental sustainability, animal welfare, and human health. Far less attention has been paid to their role in cultivating what I call “spiritual wellness.” Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and textual analysis, this paper examines emerging discourses on the spiritual benefits of veganism and plant-based eating across Sinophone societies. In these discourses, food is increasingly understood not merely in nutritional terms but as a medium for spiritual self-cultivation. Eating, in this sense, becomes a practice of spiritual cultivation that connects the individual with the transcendent or with a larger cosmological order. Highly syncretic in nature, spiritual veganism in the Sinophone world draws inspiration from yogic dietary philosophy, Ayurveda, Chinese medicine, Chinese *yangsheng* traditions, Buddhist ethics, and contemporary wellness concepts about energy and vibration. By analysing contemporary vegan practices not only as ethical or ecological choices but also as practices of spiritual wellness, this paper contributes to broader discussions of how spirituality and wellbeing are conceptualized, cultivated, and intertwined in Asian contexts.

**Loretta Lou** is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Durham University, where she co-leads the *Spirituality, Health and Wellbeing* research theme at the Institute for Medical Humanities. Her research examines movements and practices that promote social justice, healing, and the wellbeing of people and the planet, with a particular focus on green living, spirituality, and self-cultivation in Sinophone societies. Combining multimodal ethnography, historical inquiry, and textual analysis, her work illuminates how personal transformation can become a catalyst for wider social change.

# Abstracts & Bios

## **Medical and Health Mobilities as Moral Economies: Care, Labor and Deservingness in Southeast Asia**

Meghann Ormond (Wageningen University)

Rather than treating medical travel as a discrete industry or episodic form of movement, this paper advances an understanding of cross-border healthcare as a lived social practice embedded in everyday strategies for managing health, risk, and belonging. It highlights three key interventions: the wellness-medical continuum as a governance strategy, the centering of visible and invisible care labor that sustains mobility, and the theorization of health access through moral economies of deservingness. By revisiting these arguments, the paper shows how medical and health mobilities unsettle national health frameworks while producing new forms of stratification. The reflection contributes to the WELL-ASIA project by offering analytical tools for understanding labor, consumption, and inequality in transnational health contexts.

**Meghann Ormond** is an Associate Professor of Cultural Geography at Wageningen University & Research. Her research explores how people who move whether by choice or necessity - navigate belonging, entitlement, and care across borders. Working at the intersections of migration and tourism studies, she examines how states and communities negotiate responsibilities for inclusion, and how historically marginalised groups co-produce place, memory, and civic learning. Across her career, Meghann has developed a sustained interest in the ethics and geographies of care, beginning with her work on transnational medical travel in Southeast Asia and evolving into a broader focus on how societies learn to live with difference. Her recent projects, including Migrantour Utrecht and Freedom Tours Wageningen, use participatory and arts-based methods to examine heritage-making by people with migration backgrounds, people with disabilities, and people identifying as queer. The author of 40+ peer-reviewed publications, she has edited special issues for *Journal of Ethnic & Migration Studies* and *Social Science & Medicine*, been in the editorial team of *Globalization & Health*, and currently serves on the editorial boards of *Tourist Studies* and *Current Issues in Tourism*.

# Abstracts & Bios

## Digital nomadism as lifestyle mobility: conceptual and empirical developments

Olga Hannonen (University of Eastern Finland)

The concept of lifestyle mobilities refers to ways of life oriented around ongoing geographic mobility. Ongoing and voluntary geographic (corporeal, embodied) mobility has become central to many privileged lifestyles. Among the phenomena that can be considered within a lifestyle mobilities framing include: Vanlife, long-term ocean cruising, grey nomadism, world schooling, lifestyle travel, lifestyle climbing, global nomadism and digital nomadism. Digital nomadism has become the most salient and visible form of contemporary lifestyle mobility. Digital nomadism is tied to collective imaginations that a place, and its branding, can provide a more fulfilling or 'better' way of life. Presently, many destinations position themselves as digital nomad-friendly, and a number of destinations have become a well-known digital nomads' 'hot-spot'. Chiang Mai in Thailand is one of the top destinations for digital nomads that attracts location independent professionals with productivity-friendly infrastructure (in the form of coworking spaces, coffeeshops and stable bandwidth), a like-minded community with an exotic locale as a background, and potential for recreational cultural activities. In this presentation I will focus on contemporary conceptual developments around lifestyle mobilities and digital nomadism and will present empirical research on Chiang Mai.

**Olga Hannonen** is a researcher at the Business School, University of Eastern Finland, and an Honorary Research Associate at the Department of Geography, Royal Holloway, University of London (UK). Her expertise is in human-nature interactions, lifestyle and trans-border mobility, including second-home tourism, residential mobilities and digital nomadism.

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\*Illustration(s) on pg. 1,3,4,17 by Iman Cinjarevic

\*The workshop is organised by the project team of 'WELL-ASIA: The Pursuit of Wellness in Southeast Asia: New Encounters and Inequalities in an Emerging Industry' ([www.well-asia.com](http://www.well-asia.com))