

The Appropriation of Yoga Practice in France: Cultural Perceptions of the Asian Body and Mind



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Abstract

Yoga, as a global practice, offers a unique lens through which cultural perceptions of the body and mind can be examined. This perspective article explores how yoga is interpreted and practiced in France compared to Asian (Chinese and Japanese) societies, particularly in relation to body control. The lead author is an experienced yoga practitioner and instructor with seven years of application, bringing a particular sensitivity and embodied understanding to the sociological dimensions of yoga. In France, where she spent 3 months observing yoga practices, it is her view that yoga is integrated with art, lifestyle, and education, reflecting socio-cultural adapted values. Therein, the idea to develop a project was imagined with a goal to understand French yoga practice. This idea is conceptualized and presented. By comparing French yoga which might emphasize more on fluidity and strength, with Asian approaches that basically emphasize more on alignment and precision, we hope to look at how different cultural frameworks shape physical awareness, control, and ultimately health. Drawing on the author's cross-cultural experience living/studying and practicing/sharing yoga in China, Japan, and briefly in France, the ultimate goal is to contribute to the development of a yoga approach that balances tradition and cultures with accessibility.

Keywords: Body and Mind; Health; People; Self-management; Yoga Styles

The Spark

The research topic by the lead author was motivated through her three-month internship in France, where she experienced a socio-cultural shift in her own (Asian) way of yoga thought and practice. Understanding yoga from the lens of French society and culture is a new awareness [1,2]. Yoga, rooted in ancient Indian philosophy (as early as the 8th century BCE), was designed to unite the body, mind, and spirit. Yoga spreads to the Western world triggered by Indian ideological reform movement (Ram Mohan Roy, Rabindranath Tagore, Ramakrishna, and Swami Vivekananda) in the latter half of the 19th century. This is due to the fact that Western society went through two world wars during

the stalemate, and they focused on the Oriental, in particular - Yoga for healing. Today, modern yoga, especially in the West, focuses primarily on physical benefits. Historically, in France, as in the West, the body and mind have long been separated, and it's only since the 1980s that the body has been put back at the center [3], while Asia has long integrated body and mind through traditional practices such as Chinese Qi Gong and Japanese martial arts. Yoga in Asia prefers a holistic approach with deeper integration of body and mind. Specifically, China emphasizes on internal energy regulation (Qi), and Japan emphasizes on precise body alignment.

But physical practice does not mean that the core values of yoga are erased. In fact, many instructors/teachers and practitioners are deeply aware of yoga's philosophical roots and skillfully integrate them into daily practice. The visible body serves as a bridge-connecting people to the deeper, often invisible, layers of the self. The author aims to explore and create a yoga practice that is both accessible and deeply rooted-one, and that honors tradition while serving modern needs. Among all the western societies practicing yoga, the author believes that French Yoga, which combines art, lifestyle, and education makes it a unique and rich case worth studying for developing the author's own yoga style and school, as a future goal. Sumei living and studying in China, Japan, and now (briefly) France, hopes to bring

these perspectives together. Let us briefly explain these keywords:

- **Art:** Art holds a significant position in French culture, and yoga itself is a form of art-of movement, of breath, of self-discovery. Both awaken beauty, creativity, and renewal from within,
- **Lifestyle:** French society emphasizes mindful living-balance, self-focus, and organic habits-principles that align naturally with yoga. Observing this lifestyle deepens the author's understanding of how values shape practice, and,
- **Education:** France has inspired the author to see yoga not just as personal practice but as part of a broader educational and cultural system.

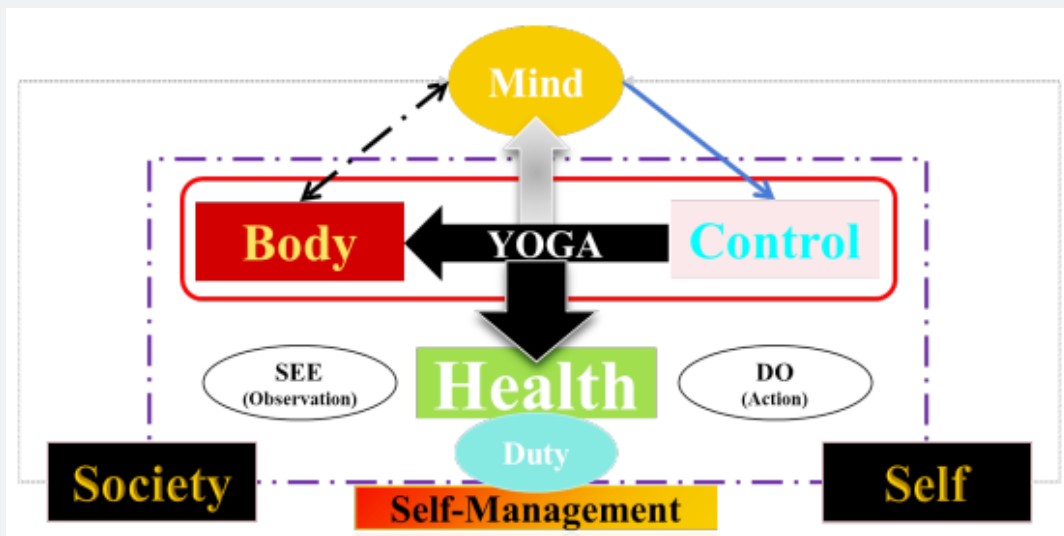


Figure 1: Conceptual Image of the Research. Definitions: Body = the physical structure (joints, muscles, movements); Control = the ability to move, align, and stabilize the body with awareness (breathing & circulation); Physical Control = How the body is aligned, moved, and stabilized in yoga practice; Health = a state of physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and social balance; Self-Management = how a person regulates their health through yoga practice and lifestyle.

The Idea Emerges

A Conceptual Diagram

This research will explore how yoga in France and Asia differs in its interpretation on body control, and how this (perception) shapes the health and self-management of a person and therein society and its overall health? Mind influences the body and a mindful (healthy) body reinforces the mind. Society and culture affect the mind shaping individual values and behavior. Yoga is the control over the body but not separated from the mind. And, yoga has been sustained since time immemorial, i.e., it has withstood the test of time. Now, human embraces Yoga across cultures, globally. Yoga practice works through the body control in conjunction with the mind with a single-minded goal of keeping health, and good health is duty to both self and society. Body is

the physical entity one sees (awareness through self-observation) and control is regulation (self-focused/directed action) [4,5]. In other words, self-management is what yoga actually is (Figure 1). A recent review on yoga interventions highlights the practice of yoga in achieving a balance and high-quality of body awareness/control [6].

Future Research

Body Control through Yoga: A Comparative Study of France and Asia's Approaches to Health and Self-Management

In France, artful and fluid styles like Vinyasa and Ashtanga yoga are highly prevalent and self-expression during movements is highlighted. In China (with its own traditions like Tai chi or Qi gong), the approach to body control integrates balance, energy

flow (Qi), and meditation. In Japan, alignment and subtle body awareness are key. Recognizing these patterns provides valuable insights into how movement practices are integrated within diverse cultural contexts. Ultimately, it is hoped this proposed study will help the lead author to create a yoga style rooted in her own cross-cultural experience-one that bridges East and West, tradition and accessibility, philosophy and practice; and to open a yoga school that is affordable-accessible-applicable (AAA+) to all.

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