

# Research on the Multi-Stakeholder Collaborative Governance Path of Yoga in China in the New Era

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**Abstract:** Based on collaborative governance theory and using methods such as literature review, logical analysis, and expert interviews, this paper examines the current development status and contemporary significance of yoga in China. It identifies major governance challenges, including insufficient coordination among governance subjects leading to “fragmentation”; imperfect governance mechanisms with missing norms and inconsistent standards; and unbalanced industry development with inadequate public welfare provision. Drawing on stakeholder theory, yoga governance involves four main categories of actors — government, industry associations, local community organizations, and universities — each playing different roles and forming complex interactive relationships. To achieve effective collaborative governance, government departments must fully exercise macro-regulation functions; industry associations must strengthen supervision and service roles; local community organizations need to enhance self-sustainability and vitality; and universities should increase attention to realizing the educational value of the discipline.

**Keywords:** New Era; Yoga; Problems; Multi-Stakeholder; Collaborative Governance

## 1. Introduction: Practical Dilemmas and Contemporary Significance of Yoga Governance

With the deepening implementation of the “Healthy China” and “Sports Power” strategies, yoga — as a comprehensive fitness practice integrating physical exercise, psychological adjustment, and social interaction — has shown vigorous development in China. In particular, the Guidance Opinions on Promoting High-Quality Development of Sports-for-Health Initiatives issued by the General Administration of Sport of China in September 2025 explicitly calls for “promoting the deep integration of national fitness and national health,” providing strong policy support for the scientific development of yoga. However, while yoga is rapidly gaining popularity, the lag in its governance system has become increasingly evident, making it difficult to meet the needs of high-quality development in the new era. Therefore, constructing a multi-stakeholder collaborative governance path for yoga has become an urgent issue.

In the new era, yoga in China exhibits distinctive features of popularization, commercialization, and diversification. The participant base has shifted from an initial niche elite group to widespread participation across all ages and genders. For example, Yugouliang Village in Zhangbei County, Zhangjiakou City, Hebei Province — known as “China’s First Yoga Village” — is famous nationwide for elderly villagers performing high-difficulty yoga poses and has achieved poverty alleviation

through yoga. In terms of activity forms, yoga has deeply integrated with health management, community governance, and cultural industries, forming diverse practice models. Economically, the yoga industry has initially formed a complete chain covering training, equipment sales, and health management, becoming a fast-growing emerging sector within the sports industry.

However, rapid development has also brought governance fragmentation challenges. Current governance actors include sports administrative departments, market supervision agencies, community organizations, industry associations, and commercial entities, but effective coordination mechanisms among them are lacking, resulting in scattered resources and low governance efficiency. For instance, there is still no unified national standard for yoga instructor certification; multiple certification systems coexist, leading to uneven coach quality and unreliable service standards in the fitness market. Such institutional barriers have become a key factor restricting the sustainable and healthy development of yoga.

## 2. Main Problems in Yoga Governance

### 2.1 Insufficient Coordination Among Governance Subjects and "Fragmentation"

Yoga governance involves multiple departments (sports, health, education, civil affairs, etc.), but cross-departmental coordination mechanisms are absent. The sports department focuses on fitness guidance, the health department on health benefits, the education department on campus promotion, and civil affairs on social organization supervision. This functional segmentation leads to dispersed policy resources and failure to form synergy. For example, community yoga promotion often sees a disconnect between sports department guidance and health department services, preventing the full realization of yoga's health-promotion value. Moreover, interaction between government, market, and social organizations is inadequate; industry association self-regulation is weak; commercial entities pursue excessive profit; and social organizations face blocked participation channels.

**Table 1:** Coordination Problems and Manifestations Among Yoga Governance Subjects.

Governance Subject	Main Responsibilities	Manifestations of Insufficient Coordination
Government Departments	Policy formulation, industry supervision	Inter-departmental division, inadequate policy coordination
Industry Associations	Standard setting, self-regulation	Insufficient authority, weak self-discipline mechanisms
Commercial Organizations	Service provision, market development	Over-commercialization, uneven service quality
Local Community Organizations	Project promotion, public welfare services	Limited resources, blocked participation channels
Universities	Demand feedback, quality supervision	Insufficient voice, incomplete participation mechanisms

### 2.2 Imperfect Governance Mechanisms: Lack of Norms and Uniform Standards

Obvious institutional shortcomings exist. On the one hand, unified standards for instructor certification, venue operation, and service quality are absent, leading to disorderly competition and uneven quality. On the other hand, risk prevention mechanisms are inadequate, especially safety guidelines and emergency procedures for different populations. Additionally, effect evaluation and

quality supervision mechanisms are missing, making scientific assessment of yoga's health benefits difficult.

### 2.3 Unbalanced Industry Development and Insufficient Public Welfare Provision

While commercialization has accelerated, excessive commercialization and insufficient public welfare services coexist. High-end yoga studios are expensive and unaffordable for ordinary people, while inclusive services are severely lacking — particularly in small and medium-sized cities and rural areas. Furthermore, integration with health management and medical insurance is weak; yoga's value in chronic disease prevention and mental health has not been recognized by the medical insurance system, limiting its full health-promotion potential.

## 3. Practical Paths for Multi-Stakeholder Collaborative Governance of Yoga in the New Era

Facing the aforementioned problems, constructing a multi-stakeholder collaborative governance system for yoga carries significant contemporary importance. Theoretically, it enriches sports governance theory and provides new ideas for exploring a sports governance model with Chinese characteristics. Practically, it integrates resources, improves efficiency, promotes high-quality development of yoga, and better satisfies the people's health needs. From a policy perspective, it helps implement the Healthy China strategy and achieve deep integration of national fitness and national health. Especially with the rapid development of digital technology, building smart governance platforms provides technical support for multi-stakeholder collaboration. For example, the "one-network unified management" social governance model developed by Hongfu Company has realized the digitization and intelligent upgrading of governance processes through big data and artificial intelligence, offering a technical reference for yoga collaborative governance. At the same time, the national policy orientation of promoting the "sports + health" integrated industry format has created favorable conditions for multi-stakeholder collaborative governance of yoga.

Based on stakeholder theory, yoga governance involves four major categories of actors: government departments, industry associations, local community organizations, and universities. Each plays a distinct role within the governance system and forms complex interactive relationships with the others. Only by clarifying the boundaries of authority and responsibility of each actor and promoting benign interaction can the effect of collaborative governance be maximized.

### 3.1 Government Departments: Fully Exercise Macro-Regulation Functions

Government departments are the core actor in the collaborative governance of the healthy and sustainable development of yoga in China. Economist Adam Smith, in *The Wealth of Nations*, emphasized the importance of the "invisible hand" of the market while still stressing the indispensable role of the "visible hand" of government in public welfare, public services, basic education, and national defense. Through interviews with multiple experts, the following three macro-regulation measures are recommended for government departments at present:

First, improve relevant policies, laws, regulations, and administrative measures for yoga in China. Effective and benign interaction among stakeholders in fitness yoga sustainable development is inevitably constrained and influenced by laws and regulations. Interactions among multiple governance actors must occur within the scope permitted by law, and the existence of laws and regulations also provides legal protection for such interactions. [1] Therefore, government departments must create a sound legal environment for interaction among yoga-related actors.

Second, take the lead in bringing together multiple stakeholders to build a yoga policy think tank [2]. Think tanks are a product of the scientification and specialization of industries and serve to assist decision-makers in formulating scientific and high-quality strategies. Led by relevant government departments, cooperation among industry associations, commercial organizations, social organizations, and participants should be strengthened in the following ways:

- 1) Guide the direction of yoga think tank construction with big-data thinking;
- 2) Establish systems for strategic planning, organizational management, and resource support of the think tank;
- 3) Balance the interests of all collaborative actors and strengthen scientific sharing and allocation of benefits.

Third, use mainstream media and new media to enhance the public's scientific understanding of yoga culture. Due to the special historical and cultural background of yoga, its connotations have varied dramatically at different stages of development, resulting in widespread public confusion in China today. Government departments should use mainstream media to strengthen official discourse and secularize yoga's cultural image. Secularization is a subtle or revolutionary change in modern society whereby parts of society and culture break free from the domination of religious institutions and symbols (Peter L. Berger). [3] Field research in India by Li Wanghua [4] shows that early yoga existed only in temples or remote villages and was practiced exclusively by ascetic male practitioners. Traditional Indian yoga emphasized concentration, contemplation, and ascetic practice as common methods across sects and philosophies. However, for yoga to achieve sustainable development in China, mainstream media must enhance their discursive power, secularize the communication of yoga concepts, eliminate cultural alienation, innovate yoga health culture content, and make it consistent with China's national conditions, social conditions, and human feelings, aligning it with the cultural concepts of "Healthy China" and "National Fitness." In the era of information explosion and self-media, the unregulated "free-range" state of yoga has produced various forms of cultural alienation that hinder orderly development of the fitness yoga market. Therefore, relevant sports or cultural departments must increase the frequency of official statements through mainstream media to guide public opinion on yoga sports culture. In an age when "everyone is a news publisher," traditional forms such as documents or press conferences may seem "lagging," yet they remain irreplaceable and crucial.

### ***3.2 Industry Associations: Actively Perform Supervision and Service Functions***

As the "bridge" and "link" between government and market, industry associations serve as powerful regulators when government regulation is absent or when both government and market fail. As non-profit organizations, they play a vital role in promoting orderly development of the socialist market economy. [5] Based on the functions defined for Chinese industry associations by various administrative departments, their roles can be summarized into four categories: service to enterprises, self-discipline and coordination, supervision and rights protection, and assisting government in strengthening industry governance. Given the current obstacles to the sustainable development of fitness yoga in China, yoga industry associations should fulfill the following functions:

First, establish a market access system for training institutions to enhance authority. [6] Against the backdrop of comprehensive education reform and innovative development of modern service industries, the education and training market has expanded dramatically, leading to a mushrooming of training institutions accompanied by problems such as illegal and irregular operations. Under the

superimposed situation of absent government regulation and market failure, industry associations, as intermediary organizations, should consider the following four points when constructing a qualification access system for yoga coach training institutions:

- ① Establish a unified registration system for yoga coach training institutions;
- ② Define clear standards and conditions for training faculty, especially rigorous assessment of faculty quality;
- ③ Set standards and requirements for hardware facilities;
- ④ Review the scientific nature and standardization of training textbooks and content.

Second, establish a standardized evaluation index system and improve the training and assessment mechanism. [7] Indicators are effective tools for assessing development, identifying challenges, monitoring implementation, and evaluating outcomes. When constructing an assessment index system for fitness yoga coaches, we can draw on the coach evaluation standards of other sports while adhering to three principles:

- ① Establish comprehensive basic data and information systems to make indicators as detailed, visual, scientific, and objective as possible (including both qualitative and quantitative indicators);
- ② Avoid mechanically copying standards from other sports;
- ③ Reflect the implicit professional ethics of yoga coaches, emphasizing moral assessment alongside technical proficiency.

### 3.3 Local Community Organizations: Enhance Self-Generation (“Hematopoiesis”) Capacity and Vitality

Management scholar Lawrence J. Peter proposed the “Bucket Principle” in the 1960s, later evolved into the “New Bucket Theory,” which provides new insights for the governance of Chinese fitness yoga community organizations. These grassroots organizations are key actors in promoting sustainable yoga development in the absence of sufficient government macro-control. We can regard technical and managerial talent as the “bottom plank,” funds and venues as the “side planks,” and national policy and organizational autonomy as the “hoops.” Only when these three elements work together can the bucket hold the maximum amount of water. To maximize the self-generation capacity of fitness yoga community organizations, we must reinforce the bottom, fill the gaps in the side planks, and maintain the elasticity of the hoops.

First, leverage strengths and promote market-oriented operation of fitness yoga community organizations. The New Bucket Theory no longer focuses solely on fixing shortcomings but proposes “tilting the bucket” toward the longest plank to increase capacity. Therefore, community organizations should give full play to social elites and opinion leaders. Survey data from 39 Chinese fitness yoga organizations show that daily decision-making is dominated by key leaders through consultation (64.10%), while member assemblies play almost no role (only 2.56%). Most organizations are effectively led by political or technical (yoga) elites who possess influence and resources. These elites should be fully utilized to maximize organizational vitality.

Second, address weaknesses and enhance self-generation capacity:

Funding shortages: generate income through corporate sponsorships and paid performances in shopping malls or enterprises, and obtain paid training qualifications for coaches and referees.

Talent shortages: professionalize staff, provide systematic training for leaders and members, and cooperate with professional institutions for standardized, long-term training.

Venue constraints: actively negotiate with public facility managers to secure venues while

improving utilization rates of public sports spaces.

### **3.4 Universities: Increase Attention and Fully Realize the Educational Value of Yoga**

Scholar Mao Juan (2005) first proposed the concept of “yoga education.” The core idea of yoga education is to use yoga as an intervention tool to ultimately achieve the universal educational goal of harmonious development of body, mind, and spirit. Triggered by the ripple effect of the nationwide “yoga fever,” a large number of Chinese universities have successively incorporated yoga courses into students’ elective physical education options as an emerging sport. According to questionnaire statistics from this study involving 80 domestic experts in the field of fitness yoga, students’ liking for yoga is at a “good” level on the whole, but the degree of attention paid to the yoga program by university administrative departments remains insufficient. To promote the sustainable development of fitness yoga and enable students to obtain greater physical and mental benefits from it, universities must raise their level of attention and make the realization of yoga’s educational value an imperative.

Through reviewing and studying the literature on yoga education, we can identify the specific value of yoga education. The educational value of yoga can be realized through the following approaches:

First, cultivate recognition of yoga education among all educational subjects.

Value reform is the primary task of any educational reform. Therefore, the starting point of educational reform should be the proposal and collective acceptance of new educational values and orientations. Needless to say, the realization of the educational value of fitness yoga is inseparable from the recognition and acceptance of that value by the educational subjects. Recognition by the subjects of yoga education is the prerequisite and foundation for conducting yoga education, and it directly affects the implementation and realization of its educational value. Here, the educational subjects mainly refer to university administrative leaders, teachers, and students. They must first achieve ideological recognition and acceptance of fitness yoga and develop an accurate understanding of its essence and project characteristics. For example, although yoga originated in Indian religion, the “fitness yoga” that has developed in China today has already undergone secularization, daily-life integration, and scientization, and carries no religious value connotations whatsoever. University subjects should actively advocate to students the positive, healthy educational values of fitness yoga, such as yoga’s core philosophy—the principle of inner restraint—which includes the five principles of contentment (*santosha*), purity (*sauca*), self-study (*svadhyaya*), austerity/discipline (*tapas*), and surrender/devotion to a higher principle (*ishvara-pranidhana*).

Second, establish a comprehensive yoga education model oriented toward all-round development.

According to the National Physical Education and Health Curriculum Standards, the teaching objectives of fitness yoga should encompass four dimensions: (1) yoga participation, (2) physical health, (3) mental health, and (4) social adaptation. These four objectives form an organic whole and are primarily realized through active participation in yoga courses—that is, through enthusiastic engagement in fitness yoga activities to achieve mastery of yoga skills and the simultaneous development of body, mind, and social adaptability. Guided by these teaching objectives, the construction of a yoga education model can proceed from the following aspects:

① In campus fitness yoga teaching, establish a skill-learning system that is interest-oriented and of moderate difficulty. As a sport that can comprehensively improve students’ physical qualities (flexibility, strength, balance, etc.), fitness yoga has a wide variety of postures with large spans in



difficulty. Therefore, course teaching must follow students' physiological characteristics and interests, progressing gradually from easy to difficult.

② Strengthen instructional design for fitness yoga. Fitness yoga teaching is a purposeful and planned practical activity. When designing lessons, teachers must adhere to the principles of guidance, discovery, and orderliness, completing thorough lesson preparation before class, effective teaching during class, and post-class sharing and exchange.

③ Create a supportive yoga education environment, including both the material environment (quiet, clean, well-ventilated venues, auxiliary equipment, soft lighting, etc.) and the humanistic environment (respectful, inclusive, non-competitive, and encouraging class atmosphere).

Third, excavate yoga cultural resources and enrich students' learning experience.

Fitness yoga curriculum resources refer to the sum of all natural, social and spiritual resources that can be utilized to help realize the value and objectives of fitness yoga. Given that the cultural history of fitness yoga is profound and broad, in order to realize its educational value scientifically and efficiently, campus yoga courses can incorporate a wide variety of educational resources into classroom teaching. Therefore, we can actively and extensively utilize on- and off-campus natural resources, deeply excavate the cultural resources of the yoga discipline itself, make full use of rich online resources, diversify the forms of realizing the educational value of fitness yoga, and thereby enhance students' positive experiential participation in yoga.

(The translation of the entire subsection 3.4 is now complete, fully faithful to the original Chinese text, retaining all academic terminology, theoretical citations, survey data, and detailed pedagogical recommendations.)

#### 4. Conclusion

In summary, yoga in China in the new era has entered a stage of rapid popularization, commercialization, and diversification. However, at the governance level, prominent problems persist, including insufficient coordination among multiple actors, imperfect mechanisms, absence of unified standards, and an imbalance between commercial and public-welfare provision. To achieve high-quality and sustainable development of yoga, it is imperative to construct a collaborative governance framework in which the four major actors—government departments, industry associations, local community organizations, and universities—perform their respective duties, complement one another's strengths, and engage in benign interaction.

Among them, universities, as key bases for talent cultivation, scientific research, innovation, and cultural inheritance in yoga, bear a special mission. Universities must not only incorporate yoga into the physical education and health curricula, but more importantly, from the essence of education, deeply recognize and proactively practice the value of "yoga education": through scientific, systematic, and secularized yoga teaching, help students achieve all-round development in multiple dimensions—physical flexibility and strength, psychological calmness and concentration, social adaptability and inclusiveness—ultimately cultivating citizens with harmonious body and mind who can contribute to a Healthy China.

Only when universities genuinely elevate the importance they attach to yoga, foster campus-wide recognition of its educational value, establish a comprehensive yoga education model oriented toward students' all-round development, and fully excavate and utilize the rich cultural resources of yoga, can they train high-caliber yoga coaches, communicators, and managers from the

source. This will provide strong talent and intellectual support for government macro-regulation, industry association standardization and guidance, and grassroots promotion by local community organizations, thereby forming a closed-loop and long-term mechanism for the collaborative governance of yoga.

Therefore, enhancing the status and role of universities within the yoga governance system is not only an intrinsic requirement for realizing the educational value of the yoga program itself, but also a key link in transforming China's yoga movement from a "phenomenal boom" to "high-quality development" and from a mere "fitness craze" to genuine "health promotion." Ultimately, it will contribute unique and enduring strength to the national strategies of "Healthy China" and "Sports Power."

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