

Transformation of Yoga in Bali in the Era of Global Tourism

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Abstract: The dynamic interplay of globalization and spiritual tradition creates a cultural synthesis. This study examines the transformation of yoga practices in Bali as driven by global consumerism. Using a qualitative approach, the research draws on observations and interviews with studio founders in Ubud, Seminyak, and Denpasar. The study identifies four main areas: ideology, practices, management, and symbols. The results show a shift from spiritual practices to commercialized wellness routines. Western-run studios emphasize commercial interests through paid services and international branding, while local founders favor community-focused approaches. The adaptation of Hindu spiritual symbols reflects a move away from cultural specificity and raises concerns about the erosion of local heritage. This research contributes to understanding how Bali's deep-rooted rituals integrate with modern yoga practices introduced by global tourism. It highlights resistance to homogenization while honouring both tradition and new practices, adapting to modern influences without losing unique original values.

Keywords: transformation of yoga; ideology; spiritual symbols; global tourism; Bali

1. Introduction

Yoga studios in Bali reflect a diverse spectrum of approaches to conducting yoga practices (Sutarya, 2018; Utama, 2018). While some studios emphasize a commercial approach, others maintain spirituality as a core program. For instance, prominent studios such as Yoga Barn in Ubud and Olop Studio in Seminyak have embraced more commercial aspects than spiritual ones, catering to the booming wellness tourism industry (Aditya, 2016; Maharani, 2023; Saitya & Suryanti, 2021). These studios often focus on modern amenities, luxurious

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facilities, and market-driven strategies, leveraging digital platforms to attract practitioners.

The development of yoga practices across different regions in Bali, namely Ubud, Denpasar, and Seminyak, varies significantly, reflecting distinct sociocultural and economic backgrounds (Aditya, 2016; Maharani, 2023). Ubud has gained international recognition as a yoga hub, celebrated as a spiritual retreat attracting practitioners from across the globe seeking peace, balance, and inner harmony. Practices in Ubud are centred on meditation and soul-calming techniques. By contrast, Denpasar, as the capital of Bali and a centre of economic activity, reflects different dynamics. Yoga studios in Denpasar offer a variety of modern yoga styles, often aligned with the city's business and entertainment-oriented tourism. Meanwhile, Seminyak, a coastal destination renowned for its beaches and luxurious lifestyle, incorporates yoga into its fashionable and modern identity. Influenced by the area's fashion and beauty industries, yoga practices often take on a trend-driven, lifestyle-oriented approach (Sulastri, 2022).

This phenomenon has positioned yoga as a thriving industry in Bali (Aditya, 2016; Maharani, 2023; Saitya & Suryanti, 2021). As yoga gains global popularity and integrates into the capitalist market, a new economy emerges, encompassing yoga studios, apparel, accessories, and wellness retreats (Shearer, 2022). This shift reflects broader cultural changes, wherein spirituality is commodified and transformed into a marketable product, potentially altering the authenticity and essence of traditional yoga practices. The commodification of yoga practices raises pressing questions about whether modern influences are homogenizing cultural traditions. Bourdieu's social practice theory suggests a shift in habitus, where spiritual roots are increasingly eclipsed by market-driven norms and consumerist tendencies.

Modern yoga practices focus on individual well-being and self-actualization, reflecting a shift away from their spiritual origins (Karuniati & Sugiantiningsih, 2022). This illustrates how yoga has evolved to serve both cultural identity and global wellness trends. In Denpasar, wellness tourism emphasizes modern amenities and international branding strategies, further embedding yoga into the capitalist framework (Sanjaya et al., 2024). Traditional medicinal practices are marketed under the guise of authenticity while subtly aligning with global wellness trends (Mediastari, 2020). This phenomenon is particularly evident in the development of yoga studios that integrate luxury and modern branding while reducing cultural specificity (Ramadhani & Alamsyah, 2024; Herviana & Budiawan, 2022). Such a shift is indicative of a broader trend where cultural practices become commodified and reconstructed to align with tourist expectations, thereby risking the dilution of traditional values.

As transformation of yoga from its spiritual origins to a focus on wellness, self-actualization, and commodification, it reflects broader social, economic, and cultural dynamics shaped by global tourism and consumerism. Are modern influences homogenizing cultural traditions? And what forms of transformation are occurring? Research on this issue is crucial for understanding how traditional practices adapt to contemporary demands while navigating the tensions between cultural preservation and modernization. The results of this study not only illuminate the evolving role of yoga in modern societies but also provide valuable insights into the impact of global influences on local traditions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *Historical of Yoga Commercialization*

In the Balinese context, yoga has been studied as a spiritual meditation practice influenced by Hindu-Balinese philosophy and spirituality (Mediastari, 2020). Yoga and meditation, as part of therapeutic procedures, are rooted in religious and cultural traditions with an emphasis on Hindu-Balinese philosophies. Ariantini (2021) and Ambarsari (2022) highlight changes in the meaning of yoga rituals in Bali, noting their transition from sacred practices. This historical shift reflects the dynamic interplay between traditional values and modern adaptations in yoga practices.

The commercialization of yoga practices began in 1978. Ketut Arsana began as a local Balinese yoga teacher for foreign tourists and founded Body Work and Meditation in 1980 (Sutarya, 2018). Other yoga teachers such as Kembar Madawan and Sumantra received opportunities in the 1990s, and Guru Made Sumantra developed Markendya Yoga in 1995. Markendya is used as a symbol representing the first teacher from India to introduce yoga in Bali, while the exercises primarily consist of common asanas with some creative adaptations. Since then, the development of yoga in Bali has become increasingly commercialized, aiming to attract foreign tourists as part of the global tourism industry.

In Ubud, yoga practices have undergone a long journey from ancient times to the emergence of renowned yoga centres such as the Yoga Barn, which is highly popular among foreign tourists (Sutarya, 2018). With its rich culture and integration of modern health philosophies, Ubud provides a supportive atmosphere for the study of yoga as a spiritual practice, continuing the region's legacy as a source of artistic and philosophical inspiration (Wijaya et al., 2018).

While Ubud is known for its traditional and holistic approach to yoga, practices in other areas, such as Seminyak and Denpasar have a more modern and fitness-oriented atmosphere (Buana et al., 2020; Wijaya et al., 2018). The open and supportive socio-cultural conditions in Seminyak have created a

favorable environment for the development of modern yoga (Mahendra, 2024). In Denpasar, yoga centres also function as social spaces, bringing local communities together (Sanjaya et al., 2024).

Although the spiritual roots of yoga in the Hindu-Balinese context have been widely studied, existing research does not fully explore how these roots are adapted in modern practices. A deeper examination of the interplay between traditional spiritual values and contemporary lifestyle trends is needed to strengthen the argument.

2.2 *Commodification Yoga Practices*

Research on the commodification of yoga in the context of spiritual tourism has been widely conducted, particularly regarding its forms of commercialization. The commodification of yoga through apparel, books, and other related merchandise is evident in the proliferation of the yoga lifestyle (Bower & Cheer, 2017). Shearer (2022, p. 51) noted that yoga merchandise has a strong market presence, primarily consisting of clothing and practice accessories.

The increasing trend of wellness tourism has made yoga a significant segment in Bali's tourism industry, offering opportunities to cater to global travellers in search of health and relaxation (Kadek, 2022; Meikassandra & Prabawa, 2020). Yoga is a unique cultural and spiritual asset, attracting tourists from all over the world (Saitya & Suryanti, 2020). It attracts global tourists, emphasizing its role in spiritual tourism development. Foreign studio owners and teachers play significant roles in promoting this wellness industry and organizing international events (Sanjaya et al., 2024).

Yoga has been commodified, transforming a purely cultural practice into a profit-driven industry, leading to the commercialization of its current form (Hemamalini, 2018). It has been decontextualized, losing much of its traditional and philosophical depth, and repackaged as a lifestyle product to fulfil societal desires for comfort, pleasure, and social identity (Maharani, 2023; Herviana & Budiawan, 2022). This commodification includes superficial modifications, such as adapting Sanskrit terms to modern languages and prioritizing physical aesthetics over spiritual or philosophical teachings.

Previous study provides valuable insights into the commercialization of yoga, particularly in the context of tourism in Bali. However, there is insufficient research on how this commercialization affects the cultural significance of yoga as a spiritual practice. Additionally, the impact on local communities, particularly their perspectives on these changes, remains largely overlooked.

2.3 Cultural Appropriation

Cultural appropriation in yoga involves the use of cultural symbols and practices without proper acknowledgment or respect for their origins (Antony, 2018). Sacred symbols, such as the *Om* sign and lotus motifs, are often used decoratively in yoga studios and retreats, stripped of their cultural and spiritual significance in the Balinese context (Saitya & Suryanti, 2020). These symbols, central to Hindu worship and philosophy, are frequently reduced to aesthetic ornaments catering to global consumer preferences, risking the trivialization of their sacred meaning.

The study of ancient rituals, such as *melukat*, a spiritual cleansing ceremony rooted in Hindu-Balinese philosophy, has been explored in the context of wellness tourism (Surpi, 2021; Karuniati & Sugiantiningsih, 2022). Yoga studios and retreat centres incorporate this practice as a complementary activity. Often simplifying or recontextualizing its sacred meanings or recontextualizing their sacred meanings to align with global trends. Symbols such as mudras, mantras, and offerings are repackaged as therapeutic elements to appeal to an international audience.

The use of spiritual symbols in yoga practices has become a significant component of the island's wellness tourism industry (Saitya & Suryanti, 2020; Surpi, 2021). The increasing commercialization of yoga has raised questions about cultural and symbolic appropriation as global influences continue to overshadow traditional practices deeply rooted in Bali's spiritual heritage. This underscores the importance of studying the transformation of yoga on the island to understand how these changes impact practices, the agency of local practitioners, and the adoption of sacred local symbols in the age of the global tourism industry.

2.4 Traditional Balinese Yoga and Global Adaptations

Traditional Balinese yoga is deeply rooted in Hindu-Balinese philosophy, emphasizing spiritual growth and self-purification through rituals, meditation, and breathing techniques. Its focus is more on inner discipline, *pranayama* (breath control), and mental clarity than on physical postures (Surpi, 2021). This form of yoga prioritizes connection with divine energies, and is often integrated with rituals in which sacred symbols and mantras play a pivotal role in fostering harmony between the body, mind, and spirit.

In contrast, global adaptations of yoga, particularly within Bali's wellness tourism industry, have redefined traditional frameworks to align with contemporary wellness trends. These practices have been commercialized to cater to international audiences, emphasizing physical fitness and relaxation

over spiritual depth. Spiritual symbols have been stripped of their original meanings and repackaged as aesthetic or therapeutic elements (Saitya & Suryanti, 2020; Karuniati & Sugiantiningsih, 2022).

This transformation highlights a significant shift in the ideological and symbolic frameworks of yoga in Bali. Traditionally, yoga served as a medium for spiritual enlightenment and self-discipline, deeply connected to Hindu cosmology and local cultural values. However, in its globalized form, it has become a commodified wellness product, emphasizing physical aesthetics, mindfulness, and consumer appeal. This shift raises concerns about cultural and symbolic appropriation, as global influences continue to alter the original philosophical foundations of Balinese yoga.

3. Method and Theory

This research employed a qualitative approach based on critical analysis, incorporating interviews with studio founders and direct observations of activities in yoga studios and retreat centres. The study was conducted in Ubud, Denpasar, and Seminyak, the main centres of yoga activities in Bali. By exploring different locations, the study enabled a comparative analysis of how yoga is practiced, taught, and experienced in different settings.

Data collection methods included recording and photo-documentation at each informant's yoga studio, capturing both the studio facilities and supporting services such as gift shops, cafés, or on-site restaurants. The findings were then discussed with the informants to understand the significance and motivations behind these facilities. The informants in this study included Made Gunarta, founder of The Yoga Barn; Ama Ati, founder of Subaktabola Studio; Siwa Ambara, founder of Yoga Tertawa; Ode Purnama, founder of Seger Oger Yoga; Ida Rsi Manuaba, founder of Sidemen Retreat; Olop Arpipi, founder of Olop Yoga; and Thomas, founder of Desa Seni Yoga Retreat. The average observation period was 1 to 2 hours, while each interview lasted approximately 2 to 3 hours.

To examine the research questions, three theories are utilized: (1) Power Relation Theory, (2) Social Practice Theory, and (3) Spirituality Post-Religious Theory.

Power Relation Theory (Foucault, 2002; Ashraf, 2016) is used to examine the dynamics between global influences and local Balinese culture in the transformation of yoga practices. It analyses how power imbalances between foreign yoga studio founders and local practitioners shape the commodification and adaptation of traditional Balinese yoga. This study conducts interviews with local yoga teachers and foreign studio founders to explore their roles and perspectives in shaping yoga practices. Additionally, interactions between international tourists and local practitioners at yoga retreats and studios are

observed to understand the influence of global consumer demands on local cultural expressions (Surpi, 2021). Marketing materials, such as websites and advertisements, are also analysed to determine how Balinese yoga practices are framed and the power narratives they reflect.

Social Practice Theory provides a framework for studying how yoga, as a social and cultural practice, evolves within its context of daily rituals and broader societal influences (Bourdieu, 1986). In this study, it focuses on how traditional and modern yoga practices are performed, sustained, and adapted by individuals and communities. Observations are conducted in yoga classes and retreats to document the practices and rituals performed, particularly the blending of traditional Balinese elements such as *melukat* or offerings with modern wellness trends (Karuniati & Sugiantiningsih, 2022). Practitioners and participants are interviewed to understand how they incorporate yoga into their daily lives and how they perceive its spiritual, cultural, or wellness aspects (Saitya & Suryanti, 2020). Cultural symbols are analysed such as *mudras*, and mantras are utilized or recontextualized in yoga practices to examine how they are utilized or recontextualized in yoga practices to meet global demands while either retaining or losing their original meanings (Surpi, 2021).

Spiritual Post Religious Theory (Michels, 2004) is used to explore how yoga in Bali transcends traditional religious frameworks and becomes part of a broader spiritual and wellness narrative. It examines the shift from yoga as a religiously grounded practice to a more secularized spiritual experience. Interviews are conducted with yoga practitioners and retreat participants to explore their motivations, focusing on how they define spirituality and its connection to yoga. The content of yoga classes and retreats is analysed, particularly how spiritual elements are presented through meditation, breathwork, or philosophical teachings without necessarily referencing their Hindu-Balinese religious roots (Karuniati & Sugiantiningsih, 2022). Observations are also made on the adaptation of rituals in settings marketed for global wellness rather than their original religious contexts (Surpi, 2021; Saitya & Suryanti, 2020).

4. Results & Discussion

This study found that yoga in Bali, originally rooted in spirituality and philosophy, is undergoing a shift toward capitalist and materialistic values. The influence of power relations is evident, as global capitalist ideologies and the preferences of foreign tourists dominate and reshape local cultural practices. Yoga practitioners increasingly prioritize physical fitness and relaxation over deep spiritual elements, reflecting a broader adaptation to the practical, fast-paced demands of modern lifestyles introduced by foreign tourists from diverse cultural backgrounds (Ida Rsi Manuaba interview, 31 December 2023;

Ode Purnama interview, 31 December 2023).

These shifts extend beyond ideology to the implementation of yoga practices, as well as management and symbolic adaptations (Ama Ati interview, 31 December 2023; Made Gunarta interview, 5 January 2024). Yoga, once practiced in sacred and tranquil spaces, is now primarily conducted in luxury studios with modern facilities, replacing the traditional atmosphere with Western-inspired aesthetics. These changes highlight the ongoing commodification of yoga, raising questions about the preservation of its cultural and spiritual essence amid modern influences. This transformation aligns with Social Practice Theory, as it reflects the dynamic interplay between cultural traditions and evolving societal norms (Bourdieu, 1986). Management practices are also changing, with yoga courses increasingly being organized as professional enterprises, utilizing global marketing strategies and collaborating with tourism platforms. Traditional yoga symbols, such as mandalas and statues of Hindu deities, have been modified or combined with Western symbols, creating a cultural fusion. This adaptation aligns with Post-Religious Spirituality Theory (Michels, 2004), as it demonstrates how symbols and practices are secularized and recontextualized to fit modern, commercialized environments that prioritize individual and lifestyle-oriented experiences.

4.1 The Commercialization Aspect of Yoga

The commercialization of yoga in Ubud, Seminyak, and Denpasar highlights the intersection between traditional practices and capitalist ideologies, where market forces and commercial interests influence how yoga is offered and consumed. The yoga industry in Ubud includes world-class retreats, workshops, and merchandise, with prices that are relatively high, reflecting the affluent target market of international tourists seeking a comprehensive and immersive experience (Made Gunarta interview, 5 January 2024).

In Seminyak, yoga studios cater primarily to tourists and expatriates, emphasizing convenience and accessibility. Packages and promotions are common, and yoga is often integrated with other fitness and wellness activities, aligning with broader lifestyle trends. In contrast, yoga in Denpasar is less commercialized compared to Ubud and Seminyak, with studios and classes primarily serving the local community. These offerings are generally more affordable and place a stronger emphasis on cultural preservation and authenticity rather than market-driven expansion (Ode Purnama interviewed, 2 January 2024).

The cost of Yoga Teacher Training (YTT) varies significantly between Ubud, Seminyak, and Denpasar, reflecting differences in target audiences, training depth, and inclusivity. Ubud generally offers a wide range of training options, with prices ranging from budget-friendly programs to approximately

\$3,200 for a 200-hour course. Most programs in Ubud are Yoga Alliance certified and often include accommodation, making them attractive to international students seeking immersive experiences (Made Gunarta interview, 5 January 2024).

In comparison, Denpasar maintains moderate pricing, with 100-hour programs ranging from US\$1,200 to \$1,300 and 200-hour programs costing between \$1,800 and \$2,100. While Denpasar's YTT structure is similar to Ubud's, it generally does not emphasize tourism-driven, retreat-style programs, and accommodation is sometimes included but not always (Ode Purnama interviewed, 2 January 2024).

Unlike Ubud and Denpasar, Seminyak's YTT programs, particularly at local studios, often provide studio certifications instead of the globally recognized Yoga Alliance certification, making them less suitable for international teaching careers. The costlier YTT options in Seminyak, priced around \$1,799 for 200 hours, are more aligned with Western fitness and wellness trends, catering to individuals interested in hot yoga and high-intensity styles (Olop Arpipi interview, 16 April 2024)

Overall, Ubud's yoga training scene is the most diverse and high-end, Denpasar balances affordability with certification credibility, and Seminyak remains the most budget-friendly but less internationally recognized.

This study identifies four forms of transformation:

4.2 Transformation of Ideologies

The ideological transformation of yoga practice in Bali reflects significant changes in the understanding of yoga from the past to the present (Karuniati & Sugiantiningsih, 2022). Historically, yoga in Bali was closely linked to spiritual and religious aspects, often serving as an integral part of Hindu rituals and the pursuit of inner peace through meditation and worship of deities (Sutarya, 2018). Rituals such as *canang sari* offerings and spiritual practices such as meditation and *pranayama* conscious regulated breathing were integrated into yoga sessions, emphasizing the strong connection between yoga, spirituality, and Hindu rituals in Bali. The primary goal was to achieve spiritual awareness and a harmonious relationship with the universe (Mediastari & Agung, 2020).

Today, yoga is widely viewed as a form of physical and mental exercise aimed at health and fitness (Sanjaya et al., 2024). Driven by market demands, it has transformed into a lucrative commodity, offering financial opportunities while departing from its traditional philosophical and spiritual essence. In Ubud, yoga practice has evolved from being primarily a Hindu spiritual practice into a widely accessible activity (Karuniati & Sugiantiningsih, 2022). This phenomenon

attracts tourists from around the world, not only for Bali's renowned cultural heritage but also for its health and fitness offerings (Made Gunarta interview, 5 January 2024; Siwa Ambara interview, 27 December 2023). The transformation is evident in how yoga is now practiced, with the primary goal being to achieve physical fitness and mental well-being (Olop Arpipi interview, 16 April 2024; Ode Purnama interview, 31 December 2023). Similar shifts in the purpose and meaning of yoga are also observed in Seminyak and Denpasar.

The influx of expatriates, travellers, and yoga teachers has diversified yoga styles in Seminyak, including the notable Iyengar style practiced at Olop Yoga Studio. Catering to international tastes, yoga classes and retreats emphasize health, relaxation, and holistic living, often offering sessions in multiple languages. The influence of global tourism and foreign practitioners has further popularized yoga practices in the region. Figure 1 illustrates the focus of yoga practice on health, relaxation, and holistic living, with organized sessions tailored to suit different practitioners. The use of props such as chairs and cushions, along with the calm atmosphere, indicates a therapeutic approach to yoga.



Figure 1. Olop Yoga Studio, Seminyak practice session (Photo by Ningrum, 2024).

Denpasar remains more insulated from the direct impact of globalized yoga trends (Ode Purnama interview, 31 December 2023; Nurwasih & Putra, 2021). Yoga in Denpasar still emphasizes health and fitness as a core purpose, reflecting its practical value for physical and mental well-being. With fewer foreign influences, the practices maintain a stronger connection to the traditional aspects of yoga, including local rituals, music, and spiritual philosophies. This

local influence fosters a sense of community and shared understanding among practitioners, contributing to the development of a distinctive yoga culture in Denpasar that is less influenced by western commercialized yoga trends. Community yoga practitioners in this area focus more on the essence of the practice than the latest fads.

Yoga practice in Ubud, Seminyak, and Denpasar has seen a significant shift from its original spiritual and meditative roots in Bali. Traditionally, yoga in Bali was deeply connected to the island's spiritual culture, emphasizing mindfulness, inner balance, and self-reflection. However, with the rise of tourism and commercialization, particularly in these popular destinations, yoga has become more of a wellness commodity. This shift has led to a departure from the original purposes of Bali's yoga, transforming it into a globalized wellness trend centred around profit and consumerism (Made Gunarta interview, 5 January 2024; Ida Rsi Manuaba interview, 31 December 2023). This commercialization has introduced new power relations, as described by Foucault, where institutions, tourism industries, and global consumer demands shape yoga as a commodity rather than a spiritual practice (Foucault, 2002; Ashraf, 2016). Consequently, yoga in these regions has transitioned into a globalized wellness trend driven by profit and consumerism, departing from its traditional purposes and adapting to the expectations of an increasingly diverse and international demands.

4.3 Transformation of Practices

The process of practicing yoga in Bali, particularly in Ubud, Seminyak, and Denpasar, has undergone a significant transformation from its original form (Meikassandra & Prabawa, 2020). In the past, it was more of a personal journey towards spiritual enlightenment. However, with the flow of global tourism, the process of achieving personal enlightenment has become different depending on the demand of visitors coming to Bali. This align with Spirituality Post-Religious Theory. This theory posits that individuals to engage with spirituality in more personal and customized ways. The practice has been repackaged into a form of secular spirituality that emphasizes personal goals and interests, rather than its traditional role in spiritual enlightenment or religious rituals.

In the traditional practices of yoga in Bali, was deeply spiritual and ritualistic. Preparation began with cleansing rituals, like prayers and offerings to the gods, designed to purify both the body and the space (Putra, Yasa, & Utama, 2022). Practitioners would wear simple, traditional clothing, flower, and fire. The sessions were held in sacred places, such as temples or open-air spaces in nature, to connect with the spiritual elements. The yoga itself focused on meditation, breathing exercises or pranayama to align the body with spiritual consciousness (Ida Rsi Manuaba interview, 31 December 2023; Ode

Purnama interview, 31 December 2023). Closing the session often followed by a communal sharing of food as part of a spiritual gathering.

The transformation of process extends to the yoga curricula, incorporating elements such as professional management and a focus on packaged services that combine traditional and contemporary needs (Meikassandra & Prabawa, 2020). Yoga studio's curricula adopt local Balinese wisdom healing techniques. Yoga Barn Ubud, offers five-day yoga courses and workshops that combine yoga, meditation and traditional Balinese healing practices (Made Gunarta interview, 5 January 2024). Other yoga studios offers a unique program that combines yoga, meditation and traditional Balinese healing practices, including massage, acupressure and herbal remedies made from plants and plant roots (Ama Ati interview, 31 December 2023).

For example in Yoga Tertawa, the opening pose, called *senyum lebar*, is a standing move with feet shoulder-width apart, extend the arms to sides and clasp both palms behind your back while smiling broadly (Siwa Ambara interview, 5 January 2024). Figure 2, shows part of practice, how the smile spreads throughout your body, releasing tension and creating a carefree feeling. The next pose is *tertawa lepas*. Sit comfortably on the floor and stretch your legs forward. Hold the backs of your thighs with both hands and lean back slightly. Then laugh freely as you sway your body from side to side. Siwa Ambara mentioned that this pose brings joy through laughter, and gently works the muscles of the body. The *berjalan gembira* movement is a fun way to increase energy and calmness. Take a comfortable position and then start walking with light and joyful steps.



Figure 2. Part of Yoga Tertawa practices (Photo by Ningrum, 2024).

The *melukat* tradition, according to Ida Rsi Manuaba (interview, 31 December 2023), which was originally carried out according to the Balinese calendar and referred to specific days and spiritual meanings, has now undergone a transformation into an activity carried out according to the request. This change was largely driven by the popularity of *melukat* within the yoga community, particularly among Western yoga practitioners, who accommodated it with yoga and retreat schedules, making it an accessible activity for everyone. This shows that local spiritual activities are being incorporated into contemporary yoga activities. As noted by Ida Rsi Manuaba (interview, 31 December 2023):

Melukat should be conducted in Griya during the full moon (Purnama), the new moon (Tilem), or on certain sacred days in Bali, such as Kajeng Kliwon. However, due to the growing number of enthusiasts, it is now also conducted on other days beyond these holy occasions.

Melukat is also as part of a yoga teacher training program, before students take final examination (Olop Arpipi interview, 16 April 2024). This adoption of Balinese culture brings a new dimension to Iyengar yoga practice in this studio, combining aspects of local culture with teachings from outside yoga teachers. By combining the principles of yoga with the rich cultural traditions of Bali, Olop Studio Yoga offers a different experience by adding local cultural values that create a unique experience for the students of this studio.

In Denpasar, yoga asana poses closely align with those practiced in India, as they share a common foundation in ancient texts, such as the *Yoga Sutras*, attributed to the Indian sage *Patanjali* (Ida Rsi Manuaba interview, 31 December 2023). The texts guide practitioners on the posture and breathwork. The influence of the Yoga Sutra can be seen in the precision and alignment emphasized in asana practice which focus on synchronizing movement and breath to promote mindfulness and inner peace. The practices also incorporate local healing traditions such as energy balancing and meditation to promote holistic well-being. This fusion of ancient wisdom with local healing methods creates a unique yoga experience that nourishes not only the body but also the soul, making Denpasar a centre for seekers of physical and spiritual harmony.

In the closing sessions of yoga workshops or retreats, studios in Ubud, Seminyak, and Denpasar incorporate performances of Balinese dance and music into the practice (Made Gunarta interview, 5 January 2024; Ode Purnama interview, 31 December 2023; Olop Arpipi interview, 16 April 2024). This integration aligns with the Spirituality Post-Religious Theory, which suggests a shift from institutionalized religious practices to individualized, experience-based spirituality. The inclusion of traditional dance and music enriches the yoga experience by fostering a sense of peace, joy, and connection to Bali's

cultural heritage (Meikassandra & Prabawa, 2020). Participants not only gain the physical and mental benefits of yoga but also engage in a deeper, personal form of spirituality that transcends religious boundaries. This reflects the theory's emphasis on spirituality as a holistic, culturally resonant experience.

Transformation of process in doing yoga has evolved from a deeply spiritual, ritualistic practice rooted in Balinese Hindu traditions to a more modern, wellness-focused experience (Dewa, 2024; Karuniati & Sugiantiningsih, 2022; Meikassandra & Prabawa, 2020). In the past, yoga sessions began with offerings and prayers, emphasizing devotion and mindfulness, with a slow, meditative pace. Today, yoga is more diverse, with international influences, a focus on physical well-being, and a wide variety of styles. Modern classes emphasize relaxation, mindfulness, and personal wellness. Practicing is accompanied by trendy yoga apparel, spa services, and cafes, creating a commodified experience. This transformation highlights the process-shift from yoga as a deeply spiritual and communal practice to one that aligns with the global demand industry's consumer-driven trends.

4.4 Transformation of Management

Previously, yoga in Bali had no formal management structures. Community leaders conducted based on traditional practices, relying on informal networks, local knowledge, and mutual trust within their communities (Siwa Ambara interview, 5 January 2024). There is no written standards, and practices were rooted in Balinese customs and communal values (Dewa, 2024).

Yoga studios in Bali have increasingly been established by foreign investors under the direction of foreign managers (Ode Purnama interview, 31 December 2023). These businesses follow modern management structures, incorporating professional practices like marketing, customer service, financial planning, and global branding to cater to international clients (Ariantini, 2021). Sutarya (2018) mentions how Bali's yoga tourism, initially rooted in local traditions, has increasingly become commercialized due to the influence of foreign tourists and investors, especially in areas like Ubud, which has become a hub for international yoga practitioners. Ariantini (2021) further explains how yoga in Bali has shifted from a sacred practice tied to Balinese Hindu rituals to a commodity for global tourism. Foreign management often brings global standards, a focus on profitability. This shift has led to increased commercialization and modernization (Ambarsari, 2022). It created a disconnect from traditional Balinese values, with profits often benefiting foreign owners more than local communities.

One of three co-founders of the Yoga Barn and wife of Made Gunarta, Meghan Pappenheim, with her deep understanding of yoga from the

perspective of a well-educated American woman has significantly influenced the programming of styles and teachers at the studio (Made Gunarta interview, 5 January 2024). Based on her training and experiences, she has brought a unique blend of traditional yoga principles and the contemporary western approach to the Yoga Barn community. This merger has contributed to the centre's success in reaching a diverse audience and seamlessly integrating elements of both worlds.

In Seminyak, expatriate yoga teachers and travellers bring with them their own habitus, which is shaped by their cultural background and training experiences. Therefore, the yoga offerings in Seminyak reflect a fusion of international styles and philosophies and cater to the diverse preferences of its global clients. As mentioned by Olop Arpipi (interview, 16 April 2024),

Many of the students I mentor come from countries such as Taiwan, China, and Korea. In addition to studying Iyengar yoga, I also incorporate chanting from India. Balinese culture is included as well, such as opening the workshop with a Jero Mangku leading a Balinese Hindu ceremony.

According to Social Practice theory, individuals and groups compete in the social dynamics to gain symbolic power and legitimacy. In Seminyak, yoga studios and retreat centres compete for recognition and customers, leading to a proliferation of innovative course offerings and retreat packages designed to appeal to the tourism market. The competition promotes innovation and adaptation in the yoga space in the region as practitioners and companies seek to differentiate themselves and gain a competitive advantage. In Olop Yoga Studio, adaptation of yoga space adopt open space with Balinese garden view. It combines with the uses of modern yoga apparels such as ropes, mats to still maintain the customer demands (Olop Arpipi interview, 16 April 2024).

Unlike in Ubud and Seminyak, yoga classes in Denpasar are rarely staffed by foreign participants who want to explore the local spiritual side. Local people are coming to yoga classes. Thus, the practice of yoga in Denpasar more popular among the local population, rather than overseas visitors (Ode Purnama interview, 31 December 2023; Ida Rsi Manuaba interview, 31 December 2023). Denpasar, being less of a tourism hub compared to Ubud and Seminyak, has more locally-owned yoga studios, which contrasts with the international ownership and commercialization seen in other parts of Bali.

For example, Seger Oger Yoga Studio focuses less on formal business practices like marketing or promotion and more on maintaining the studio's authenticity, community values, and spiritual mission. Seger Oger relies heavily on word-of-mouth recommendations and the community's organic growth over time (Figure 3). It operates like a community-based organization

where participation is free, and donations are used for social causes. This makes the studio more about fostering a supportive environment than a profit-driven model (Ode Purnama interview, 31 December 2023).



Figure 3. Seger Oger yoga community gathering in Bajra Sandhi (Photo by Ningrum, 2024).

The studio offers internal teacher training for members, focusing on maintaining Seger Oger's spiritual and traditional values rather than following commercialized teacher training standards from abroad. Members are expected to follow the established spiritual and philosophical guidelines of Seger Oger, even if they have been exposed to other yoga styles or teacher training elsewhere. The core of the practice remains focused on spiritual growth through Asanas, which creates a consistent experience for all members.

Western-managed studios operate more like businesses, focusing on branding, marketing, and commercialization. Yoga Barn, for instance, is known for offering paid workshops, teacher training programs, and international yoga festivals (Made Gunarta interview, 5 January 2024). This model caters to tourists and international clients, with a focus on wellness tourism. They often introduce modern yoga styles, such as Vinyasa, Ashtanga, or Bikram, and run teacher training programs based on international standards like Yoga Alliance. These programs are often more commercialized, with a focus on health, fitness, and certification, catering to a global market (Siwa Ambara interview, 5 January 2024; Ama Ati interview, 31 December 2023). Yoga Barn studio is run with more formalized management structures. It relies heavily on social media, online platforms, and international partnerships for marketing and promoting their

retreats and programs. Western founders often use platforms like Instagram and Zoom to reach a global audience.

Local-managed studios emphasize on a non-commercial or donation-based model. Seger Oger Yoga Studio provides free yoga classes or accepts donations, which are then directed to social causes, not for profit. Ama Ati (interview, 31 December 2023) also avoids heavy commercialization by offering ceremonies and counselling without charging fees, except for accommodations and meals. They are deeply connected to their local communities. They involve the community in their studios, promoting inclusivity and accessibility to yoga. Seger Oger membership has expanded through community involvement, holding free events and focusing on service to society rather than making yoga a commodity.

Western-managed yoga studios, such as Yoga Barn in Ubud, and Olop Yoga in Seminyak exemplify power relations through their domination of resources, global networks, and economic influence. These studios reflect the power of globalization, where foreign ownership controls the narrative of yoga as a marketable product. This dynamic is in line with Foucault's Power Relation Theory, which highlights how structures of power and discourse shape practices and identities.

In contrast, the practices of locally-managed studios, such as Seger Oger Yoga Studio, underscore the role of social practice theory in preserving and promoting community-based values. By involving local communities and directing resources toward social causes, they embody a collective and egalitarian ethos, resisting the commodification of yoga. This model challenges the dominant narrative imposed by commercialized practices, emphasizing yoga as a means of cultural and spiritual enrichment rather than a market-driven product. This is in line with Bourdieu's Social Practice Theory, which emphasizes how social and cultural capital influence and are reproduced through localized, community-driven practices.

4.5 Transformation of Symbols

In Bali, spiritual symbols such as chakras, once esoteric and intangible, now take physical form, for example in crystals and stones. This change was shaped by Western influences that led to the commercialization of yoga through products that use sacred symbols. Sacred mantra *Namaste* is commodified into humorous or trendy slogans on products such as t-shirts and tote bags (Shearer, 2022). Symbols such as chakras are used on yoga studio walls or yoga mats, which has led to debate about the sacredness of these symbols. For some people, these symbols remain sacred, while for others they are merely decorations with no deep spiritual value (Ode Purnama interview, 31 December

2023). Chakra colours, which represent the body's energy centres, are becoming increasingly prominent in contemporary yoga and are often used in decorations and accessories such as yoga clothing and yoga mats. This is an example of visualizing the intangible chakra energy into a visible and tangible physical form, often used in commercial activities such as yoga festivals and retreats in Ubud and Seminyak.

Symbols such as *canang sari* or offering, *melukat* or water blessings, and fire rituals were integral to the practice, emphasizing the connection between physical yoga and the sacred aspects of Balinese Hinduism (Ama Ati interview, 31 December 2023). However, with the rise of contemporary yoga and the Western influence, these traditional symbols have undergone a transformation. For example, Yoga Barn, Olop Yoga, and others, tend to focus more on the physical and wellness aspects of yoga. The *Om* sign is often used more as an aesthetic or commercialized element rather than a spiritual one (Ode Purnama interview, 31 December 2023). Ode Purnama, highlights this transformation, noting how symbols like the "Om" are now often commodified or used in a superficial manner, such as being placed on yoga mats or accessories, which dilutes their sacred value. Studios with a Western influence often treat these symbols as part of the marketing and branding of yoga as a global wellness product, which can lead to a loss of the deeper spiritual connection they originally held.

Based on Ida Rsi Manuaba and Ode Purnama (interview, 31 December 2023), Yoga in Denpasar is also influenced by an ancient Balinese reference called Tantra. While asana poses are adopted from Indian yoga, healing and meditation techniques have roots in local wisdom, which is also mentioned in Tantra literature. For example, Rangoli food from India consist of specific herbs mentions on Ayurvedic, it is similar what mentioned on Tantra. Rangoli is traditionally drawn in homes and religious spaces as a spiritual and decorative practice (Thakur, 2014). The Rangoli is generally implement on yoga workshop to bring positive energy, prosperity to welcome yoga guests (Tadvalkar, 2015). Second examples is Kundalini lessons on Yoga, picked up from Tantra. As mentioned by Ida Rsi Manuaba (interview, 31 December 2023):

We are trained to create Rangoli using shallots, garlic, ginger, sune, and chekuh, all of which are Ayurvedic. Kundalini is Tantra; everything originates from the play of life. This is how we incorporate Kundalini into our daily lives.

Balinese *Usada* is a traditional healing system that utilizes plants, herbs, meditation, and other healing techniques to restore balance, promote well-being, and connect individuals with nature and spiritual energies (Mediastari, 2020). *Balian*, or traditional healers, are central figures in Balinese Usada.

The combination of yoga exercises and Usada teachings offers an additional dimension of depth to yoga practitioners seeking a spiritual experience. In recent years, Bali Usada has evolved and is often integrated with the global wellness movement. The healing practices are still based on traditional principles but have become more accessible to both locals and tourists. Figure 4, shows modern practice in Bali Usada Health and Calmness Meditation Center, Sanur. It organized retreats, workshops, and healing programs that attract a wider international audience, especially those interested in alternative medicine and holistic health.



Figure 4. Yoga student practice traditional usada (Photo by Ningrum, 2024).

According to Made Gunarta (interview, 5 January 2024) the practice of yoga in Bali has actually awakened local wisdom that was not previously revealed at all.

In fact, from a highly optimistic perspective, tourism promotes wellness. Tourism has helped uplift local wisdom, making it more accessible and less feared by people. Now, many are learning about traditional medicine, especially Usada and Loloh, traditional herbal drink.

In yoga sessions, participants are often invited to combine physical exercise and meditation with elements of Usada. This may include the use of traditional herbs, essential oils, or even traditional Balinese massage practices such as massage or Balinese Usada massage. These practices are intended to improve energy balance in the body, promote physical and mental healing.

According to the theory of spirituality post religion by Nietzsche, symbols are not static; they evolve as society and culture shift. The transformation of religious and philosophical symbols is necessary for cultural renewal, and new

symbols must resonate with human experience and vitality. This aligns with the transformation of symbols in contemporary yoga in Bali. Symbols that were once considered sacred are now found in various places, such as on mats, studio walls, and studio floors. However, as yoga has transitioned from traditional contexts in Bali to global settings, its symbols have evolved to meet the needs of different cultural contexts. For instance, *asana* physical postures, which once held profound spiritual significance, are now often viewed primarily as tools for physical fitness or mental well-being in yoga studios in Ubud, Seminyak, and Denpasar.

The creation of new symbols to replace the old ones is analogous to how yoga has adapted its symbols to different cultural settings. The spiritual symbols evolve to reflect the changing values and needs of society. Modern yoga reflects a transformation of its traditional symbols to fit contemporary purposes, often emphasizing personal empowerment, vitality, and well-being (Ama Ati interview, 31 December 2023; Ode Purnama interview, 31 December 2023).

5. Conclusion

The transformation of yoga practice in Bali reflects broader global trends in the commercialization of spiritual practices. The ideological foundation of yoga in Bali has shifted toward a more consumer-driven model. Yoga is increasingly viewed as a practice for physical and mental well-being rather than a path to spiritual enlightenment.

This study highlights the contrast between yoga studios managed by Westerners, which often emphasize commercialization through paid services and teacher certification programs, and those operated by locals, which frequently adopt a community-oriented, donation-based model. Additionally, the adaptation of Balinese spiritual symbols within contemporary yoga spaces suggests a fusion of local heritage with the expectations of international visitors. These symbols, while maintaining their cultural significance, also serve as aesthetic and commercial elements within globalized yoga practices.

Despite these changes, the core values of Balinese spirituality continue to shape contemporary yoga in Bali, preventing homogenization. While modern yoga studios incorporate new infrastructure such as high-end retreat centres, wellness resorts, and digital platforms for virtual classes, the essence of Balinese spiritual traditions remains embedded in the practice. Yoga practice in Bali represents a dynamic fusion where local traditions persist and adapt within new settings.

The findings of this research contribute to broader discussions about the intersection of spirituality, commercialization, and cultural adaptation in a globalized world. It raises questions for further exploration. Who are the key

agents driving the transformation of spiritual yoga into contemporary yoga in Bali, and what roles do they play? What power dynamics shape the rapid development of commercialized yoga practices? Addressing these questions through a cultural studies lens could provide deeper insights into the evolving landscape of yoga in Bali.

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