

# MAPPING AND REFRAMING DAOIST ECOLOGICAL THOUGHT IN SACRED LANDSCAPES, HUMAN - NATURE RELATIONS, AND TOURISM: A BIBLIOMETRIC SCOPING AND INTERPRETIVE REVIEW

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## Abstract

Scholarship linking ecology, sacred landscapes, pilgrimage, and tourism has expanded rapidly over the past two decades, yet Daoist ecological thought remains comparatively under-theorized within this applied conversation. This article maps that emerging conversation and offers a focused Daoist interpretive reading of its core works. Bibliographic records were drawn from Scopus (exported March 2026); after cross-corpus deduplication and a conjunctive keyword filter, a Daoist-relevant analytic set of 595 English-language documents (2005–2025) was assembled. The study combines a descriptive bibliometric scoping layer with a close interpretive reading of a hand-screened set of anchor works, read through five Daoist categories (*ziran* 自然, *wuwei* 無為, relationality/*ganying* 感應, restraint/*zhizu* 知足, and sacred landscape/*dongtian fudi* 洞天福地) organized as four tensions. Throughout, bibliometric mapping is treated as a scoping device rather than as the evidentiary core of the argument. The bibliometric picture shows a young, rapidly growing conversation led by philosophy and religious studies venues, in which Daoism is most often discussed comparatively, and its connection to applied tourism scholarship remains thin. The interpretive reading shows that, where the connection exists, Daoist categories offer an alternative vocabulary of nature as relational field rather than resource, attunement rather than control, sacred presence rather than attraction, sufficiency rather than growth. The article contributes a reflexive map of this conversation for Daoist studies, evidence of its underdevelopment, and a Daoist-informed interpretive heuristic. It does not claim that Daoism is inherently ecological, and it is limited to English-language, Scopus-indexed sources.

## Keywords

*Daoism; ecological thought; ziran; wuwei; sacred landscape; religious and spiritual tourism; human–nature relations; bibliometric scoping; interpretive review.*

## 1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, scholarship connecting ecology, sacred landscapes, pilgrimage, and tourism has expanded considerably. Sacred mountains, religious and spiritual tourism, sustainability, and human–nature relations have all become active fields, and within them, Chinese traditions are increasingly invoked as cultural resources for rethinking the human

relation to nature. Daoism figures recurrently in this literature in studies of Chinese cultural landscapes (Xu, 2024a), of Taoist values in environmental behavior and leadership (Xing, 2017; Lou, 2022), and of sacred-mountain pilgrimage and its encounter with tourism (Palmer, 2014; Favraud, 2022). Yet the way Daoism appears in this applied conversation is uneven, and its ecological categories are often compressed into a generic language of "harmony with nature."

This unevenness is the article's point of departure. As the bibliometric scoping in Section 4 shows, the conversation linking Daoist ecological thought to sacred landscapes and tourism is young, growing rapidly, and concentrated in philosophy and religious-studies venues rather than in applied tourism scholarship; the direct intersection between the Daoist-ecological literature and the sacred-landscape/tourism literature is small. In other words, while scholarship on sacred landscapes, pilgrimage, sustainability, and human–nature relations has grown, *explicit* Daoist ecological theorization within it remains comparatively underdeveloped. This is precisely the kind of gap a journal of Daoist studies is positioned to address not by exporting Daoism as a solution to tourism's problems, but by examining how Daoist ecological categories are being taken up, and at times distorted, when they travel into contemporary applied discourse, and what that encounter reveals for Daoist studies itself.

Tourism enters this article not primarily as an industry but as a contemporary arena in which sacred landscapes are reclassified, marketed, inhabited, and contested. It is for that reason a useful site for Daoist studies: it is where Daoist ecological categories travel beyond their textual and ritual settings into modern regimes of heritage, sustainability, consumption, and environmental care, and where the strain of that translation becomes visible. Tourism–environment scholarship has tended to foreground managerial, governance-oriented, and carbon-accounting vocabularies; the present article takes a different cut, following the smaller, less explicit intersection where Daoist ecological thought meets sacred landscapes, human–nature relations, and tourism-related environmental concerns.

The article does not attempt an exhaustive or systematic review. It combines a descriptive bibliometric mapping, used as a scoping layer, with a focused Daoist interpretive reading of selected anchor works. It is guided by three research questions:

**RQ1.** How can core Daoist ecological categories *ziran* 自然, *wuwei* 無為, relationality/*ganying* 感應, restraint/*zhizu* 知足, and sacred landscape/*dongtian fudi* 洞天福地 be articulated as a framework for rethinking human–nature relations in contemporary ecological and sacred-landscape contexts, of which tourism is one salient case?

**RQ2.** To what extent, and in what configuration, is Daoist ecological thought currently mobilized and left underdeveloped across the English-language scholarship linking ecology, sacred landscapes, and tourism?

**RQ3.** What does the encounter with applied and tourism-related discourse reveal about the interpretation, transformation, or distortion of Daoist ecological categories, and hence about how Daoist studies might engage contemporary environmental concerns?

RQ1 carries the interpretive argument and is developed in Sections 2 and 5; RQ2 is addressed by the scoping layer in Section 4; RQ3 is the reflexive question that the discussion returns to Daoist studies. The contribution is correspondingly threefold and deliberately modest: a reflexive map of an emerging interdisciplinary conversation, evidence that explicit Daoist ecological theorization remains comparatively underdeveloped within it, and a Daoist-informed interpretive heuristic organized around four tensions (Section 5; Table 4). The article does not claim that Daoism is inherently ecological, a claim contested within the field (Kirkland, 2001), and it confines its bibliometric base to English-language, Scopus-indexed sources, a boundary discussed in Sections 3.8 and 7.

## 2. Daoist Ecological Thought and Human–Nature Relations

### 2.1. A framing caveat

"Daoism" names neither a single doctrine nor a unified ecological program. The tradition spans the classical philosophical texts attributed to Laozi and Zhuangzi, the organized religious movements that took shape from the second century onward, and a long history of ritual, bodily, and institutional practice (Schipper, 1993; Komjathy, 2013). This article draws principally on the philosophical categories of the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, while, where the question of landscape demands it, attending to the sacred geography of religious Daoism. The categories assembled below are offered as interpretive vocabulary, not as evidence that early Daoists were environmentalists in any modern sense. That stronger claim has been directly contested within the field (Kirkland, 2001), and Section 2.6 returns to it. The point of reconstructing these categories is to ask what they make visible when set beside contemporary discussions of nature, landscape, and tourism, not to certify them as solutions. Two conventions should be noted. Classical passages are cited by chapter from standard scholarly translations of the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* (see References), and Chinese terms are given in pinyin with characters; the names of cited works retain their authors' original romanization. The reading also draws, where relevant, on Chinese-language scholarship on Daoist ecology (Chen Xia, 2010) alongside the Anglophone literature, even though, as Section 3.8 explains, the bibliometric corpus is confined to English-language sources.

### 2.2. *Ziran* 自然 (self-so-ness)

The pivotal claim of the *Laozi* is that "the Dao models itself on *ziran*" (道法自然, Laozi 25). *Ziran* is among the most mistranslated terms in the tradition. Rendered flatly as "Nature," it invites the assumption that Daoism posits a natural world standing over against human artifice. Liu Xiaogan has argued at length against this reading: *ziran* is better understood as "self-so-ness" or the spontaneous, uncoerced unfolding of things according to their own course, and even as an idealized order proper to a well-ordered human society rather than a wilderness external to it (Liu 2015). Lai (2007) similarly treats *ziran* as spontaneity and, in human terms, as a manner of acting that does not impose. Read this way, *ziran* asks how a thing comes to be what it is when it is not forced.

This does **not** mean that *ziran* assigns nature "intrinsic value" in the manner of Western environmental ethics. To translate the term into the language of value-bearing objects is already to lose its force: *ziran* describes a mode of arising and a quality of relation, not a property that the natural world possesses and that humans must learn to respect. What it offers is less a moral premise about nature than a question about whether human projects proceed by attunement or by imposition.

### 2.3. *Wuwei* 無為 (non-coercive action)

If *ziran* names the self-so unfolding of things, *wuwei* 無為 names the form of human action attuned to it. The *Laozi* pairs the two repeatedly: "the Dao constantly does nothing, yet nothing is left undone" (道常無為而無不為, Laozi 37; cf. Laozi 48). The paradox is deliberate. *Wuwei* is not inaction but action stripped of coercion and forcing; its complement, *wubuwwei* 無不為 ("nothing left undone"), insists that such action is nonetheless fully effective. The *Zhuangzi* gives the idea its most famous image in Cook Ding, whose blade moves through the ox along the natural seams and so never dulls ("Nourishing the Lord of Life," 養生主). Lai (2007) reads *wuwei* as a non-oppressive mode of conduct correlated with *ziran*; Kirkland (2001) describes the early Daoist posture as a "responsible non-action" grounded in epistemic humility about the limits of human understanding.

This does **not** mean *wuwei* is laissez-faire, passivity, or the abandonment of responsibility. Cook Ding is supremely skilled and supremely attentive; his "doing nothing" is a discipline of perception, not a withdrawal from the task. To read *wuwei* as a license to leave things alone is to confuse non-coercion with neglect, confusion with direct consequences when the term is carried into questions of governance.

#### 2.4. Relationality and *ganying* 感應 (resonance)

Daoist cosmology does not begin with discrete entities that are subsequently related; it begins with a field of *qi* 氣 in continuous transformation, within which persons, landscapes, and things are mutually constituted. The *Zhuangzi*'s "Discussion on Making All Things Equal" (齊物論) dissolves the fixed standpoint from which subject and object, self and world, can be cleanly divided. Miller (2017) develops this into an account of a "porous body" through which *qi* flows between landscape and person, and of nature as a subjective power rather than an inert backdrop; Schipper (1993) shows how the Daoist body is itself construed as a microcosm corresponding to the cosmos. The notion of *ganying* 感應 resonance, or mutual responsiveness between things of the same kind names the mechanism of this co-constitution. A point of provenance matters here: *ganying* is not a central term of the *Laozi* or *Zhuangzi* but a development of Han correlative cosmology (elaborated in texts such as the *Huainanzi*). It is invoked here to extend the *Zhuangzi*'s intuition of oneness with a later and more explicit vocabulary of resonance, not to read that vocabulary back into the classical texts.

This does **not** mean Daoist relationality is a generic slogan of "interconnectedness." Its specificity lies in the cosmology of *qi* and resonance: things affect one another because they participate in a shared, circulating vitality, not because an observer has decided to view them as a system. The difference matters for any attempt to borrow Daoist "relationality" as a ready-made alternative to subject-object dualism.

#### 2.5. Restraint and simplicity: *zhizu* 知足 and *jian* 儉

The *Laozi* returns insistently to sufficiency. "One who knows when there is enough is rich" (知足者富, *Laozi* 33); "in knowing sufficiency there is no disgrace" (知足不辱, *Laozi* 44); "no calamity is greater than not knowing what is enough" (禍莫大於不知足, *Laozi* 46). Restraint is not incidental but cardinal: among the "three treasures" (三寶) of *Laozi* 67, the second is *jian* 儉, frugality or sparingness, set beside compassion and the refusal to push oneself to the fore. The corresponding ideal of the uncarved simplicity of life is captured in the injunction to "manifest plainness and embrace the uncarved block" (見素抱樸, *Laozi* 19). Liu (2015) reads this strand as a way of life marked by simplicity and freedom from the tyranny of desire.

This does **not** mean that *zhizu* and *jian* amount to asceticism, nor to a moralizing opposition to all development. Sufficiency in the *Laozi* is a measure internal to flourishing knowing the point past which more ceases to enrich rather than an external prohibition. Read as mere anti-consumption, the category loses precisely the diagnostic edge that makes it interesting for debates about growth.

#### 2.6. Sacred landscape: *dongtian fudi* 洞天福地

Where the preceding categories are largely philosophical, the Daoist understanding of landscape is most fully elaborated in the religious tradition's sacred geography. The system of "grotto-heavens and blessed lands" (洞天福地, *dongtian fudi*) maps a network of sacred sites: caverns, peaks, and famed mountains such as the Five Marchmounts (五嶽), Wudang, and Huashan each understood as a numinous space with its own internal cosmos. This geography was codified in Du Guangting's *Record of the Grotto-Heavens, Blessed Grounds, Sacred Peaks and Marshes, and Famous Mountains* (洞天福地岳渎名山记, 901), which catalogues more than two hundred sites and treats each grotto-heaven as a complete cosmos in itself. Verellen (1995) characterizes the grotto-heaven as a "beyond within": a microcosm complete with its own sun, moon, and stars, folded into the

mountain. Komjathy (2013) emphasizes the centrality of place and sacred sites to Daoism as a lived religion, and Miller (2017) describes a "locative imagination" in which transformative power is encountered in specific landscapes rather than abstractly.

This does **not** mean that the Daoist sacred mountain is interchangeable with the generic "sacred site" of comparative pilgrimage studies. Its specificity is cosmological: the mountain is not merely a place that people regard as holy but a body and a cosmos in its own right, continuous with the practitioner's own body through the circulation of *qi*. Flattening *dongtian fudi* into "sacred space in general" discards exactly what is Daoist about it.

### 2.7. Cautions

Two cautions frame everything above. First, against romanticization. The claim that Daoism is "inherently ecological" or a native environmentalism *avant la lettre* has been forcefully criticized; Kirkland (2001) shows that the classical texts were not written as environmental philosophy and resist conscription into it. To present Daoist categories as a green doctrine waiting to be applied would repeat precisely this error. Second, against political conflation. Contemporary Chinese state discourse on "ecological civilization" (生態文明, *shengtai wenming*) draws selectively on traditional vocabulary, but it is a modern political program and must not be identified with classical Daoist thought. As Miller (2019) observes, the project tends to deploy a syncretic vision of Chinese traditions without close textual reading, so that Daoist concepts are mobilized to legitimate a state agenda rather than interpreted on their own terms; Weller (2006) situates this within a longer history in which globalized ideas of nature have interacted with and been reshaped by Chinese tradition and state policy. Keeping the classical categories distinct from their contemporary political uptake is a condition of using them responsibly.

### 2.8. From categories to a heuristic of four tensions

Taken together, the five categories suggest a set of contrasts through which contemporary discussions of nature, landscape, and tourism might be re-described. *Ziran* reframes the question of whether nature figures as a resource to be valued or as a self-so order within which human activity is one participant. *Wuwei* reframes management as a contrast between control and attunement. *Zhizu* and *jian* reframe the horizon of growth against a measure of sufficiency. *Dongtian fudi* reframes landscape as attraction against landscape as sacred presence. These four contrasts—resource/relational, control/attunement, growth/sufficiency, attraction/sacred—organize the interpretive discussion in Section 5.

It should be stated plainly that this fourfold scheme is a heuristic of the present article, not a structure internal to the Daoist tradition. The classical texts do not present their thought as a table of binary oppositions; indeed the *Laozi*'s own dialectic of mutual arising (相生, *xiangsheng*; Laozi 2) cuts against any rigid dualism. The four tensions are an analytic device for bringing Daoist categories into contact with a contemporary literature, and they are offered as such an instrument of interpretation, to be judged by what it illuminates rather than by any claim to fidelity to an original system. A caution follows from this: in the interpretive discussion of Section 5, the scheme must be held lightly, lest its oppositional form flatten the very correlative, mutually arising sensibility that the Daoist categories are meant to recover.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research design

This study combines descriptive bibliometric mapping with a Daoist interpretive reading of selected works. The two are not weighted equally. The bibliometric component is a *scoping* layer: it locates an emerging, dispersed conversation, establishes its rough contours, and identifies candidate works for closer reading. The interpretive component, developed in Sections 2 and 5, carries the analytic argument. The article, therefore, does not claim to be an exhaustive or

systematic review of all relevant literature. It offers a structured overview and a focused Daoist interpretive discussion intended to map an emerging field and open conceptual ground.

Two consequences follow. The bibliometric layer is deliberately confined to a small number of descriptive outputs; no co-citation, bibliographic coupling, or collaboration analyses are attempted, and the corpus-flow diagram (Figure 1) adopts the PRISMA 2020 reporting convention (Page et al., 2021) for transparency, without thereby making the study a PRISMA-type systematic review.

### 3.2. Data source and corpus construction

Bibliographic records were retrieved from Scopus and exported on 19 March 2026. Three separate searches were run to assemble three corpora reflecting the three strands the article connects:

**C1 Daoist ecological thought** (the Daoist core): 906 records.

**C2 sacred landscape/pilgrimage / religious-spiritual tourism** (the bridge to landscape and tourism): 3,517 records.

**C3 human-nature relational tourism** (the bridge to human-nature relations): 318 records.

The three searches used conjunctive title-abstract-keyword (TITLE-ABS-KEY) queries, each restricted to journal articles and reviews in English published between 2005 and 2025; the verbatim Scopus query strings for C1, C2, and C3 are reported in full in Appendix A. In outline, C1 paired a block of Daoist terms with a block of ecology/landscape/environment terms; C2 paired Daoist and sacred-landscape/pilgrimage terms with a tourism/heritage block and a China/place block while excluding a list of marketing-oriented tourism descriptors; and C3 paired human-nature-relational terms with a tourism block. Each search was run over title, abstract, and keyword fields; the export was restricted to English-language documents (see Section 3.8 for the justification of this restriction), and the date of extraction was 19 March 2026. For every record the following fields were retained: authors and author identifiers, title, year, source title, volume/issue/pages, citation count, DOI, EID, affiliations, abstract, author keywords, indexed keywords, document type, publication stage, open-access status, language, publisher, and cited references. These fields are reported here so that the searches can be reproduced; the cited-references field was retained specifically to permit citation analysis (Section 3.5).

### 3.3. Deduplication

The three corpora were merged and each record tagged with its corpus of origin. Duplicates were resolved through a layered match, applied in order of identifier strength: Scopus EID, then DOI, then a standardized title (lower-cased, punctuation removed, whitespace normalized), then title combined with year and first author. Because every Scopus record carries a unique EID, cross-corpus overlaps were detected reliably.

Of 4,741 exported records, 87 were removed as duplicates (85 appearing in more than one corpus, plus 2 within-corpus duplicates), leaving **4,654 unique documents**. The overlap structure is reported in Table 1, since it shows how far the three searches were in fact distinct.

**Table 1. Corpus overlap (unique documents).**

| Membership             | Documents |
|------------------------|-----------|
| C1 only                | 846       |
| C2 only                | 3,434     |
| C3 only                | 293       |
| C1 $\cap$ C2           | 56        |
| C2 $\cap$ C3           | 21        |
| C1 $\cap$ C3           | 0         |
| C1 $\cap$ C2 $\cap$ C3 | 4         |
| Total unique           | 4,654     |

The overlap is small: only 81 documents appear in more than one corpus. This is itself a finding. The sacred-landscape/tourism literature (C2) and the Daoist-ecological literature (C1) are largely separate bodies of work; the two intersect directly in only 60 documents (the 56 shared by C1 and C2, plus the 4 shared by all three corpora). This corpus-membership overlap is distinct from the keyword-based analytic set of Section 3.4, within which 76 C2 records ultimately satisfy the Daoist-term requirement. This sparse intersection motivates the filtering step that follows and, more broadly, supports the article's claim that explicit Daoist ecological theorization remains comparatively underdeveloped within the broader sacred-landscape and tourism scholarship.

### 3.4. Keyword filtering and the analytic set

The full set of 4,654 documents is not the analytic set. Running keyword or thematic analyses over it would map sacred-landscape and pilgrimage studies in general, most of which have no Daoist content. To isolate the Daoist-relevant material, records were filtered on the combination of title, abstract, author keywords, and indexed keywords using a conjunctive rule: a record was retained only if it contained **both** (a) a substantive Daoist term **and** (b) an ecology-, landscape-, or tourism-related term.

The conjunctive structure is deliberate. An earlier disjunctive formulation retaining any record with a Daoist *or* a thematic term returned almost the entire corpus ( $\approx 4,649$  records) and so discriminated nothing. Two further refinements were applied to the Daoist term set. First, the place name *Wuwei* (武威, a prefecture and basin in Gansu) was excluded as a homograph of *wuwei* 無為: a manual check found that the bare token *wuwei* matched numerous records in hydrology, soil engineering, and geology that have no Daoist content. Second, the broad descriptors "Chinese philosophy" and "Chinese religion" were dropped as standalone triggers, since they also capture Confucian and Buddhist material. The retained Daoist term set therefore comprises strong tokens (*Daoism/Taoism* and cognates, *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*, *ziran*, *daodejing/tao te ching*, *daoziang*, and related forms). A minimal thesaurus was applied to consolidate variants (e.g. *Daoism/Taoism*; *wu wei* / *wu-wei* / *wuwei*; *ziran* / *tzu-jan*) so that a single concept would not fragment into multiple nodes.

This procedure yielded an analytic set of **595 Daoist-relevant documents** (Figure 1). Of these, 519 originated in C1 and 76 in C2; none of the C3 records survived the Daoist-term requirement, confirming that the human-nature relational-tourism literature rarely engages Daoism explicitly. The set spans 2005–2025 and consists almost entirely of articles (550) and reviews (45). Cited references are present for 97% of the set, which makes citation-based analysis feasible.

Filter precision was checked by manually reading a systematic sample of 40 records (every ~18th record of the title-sorted set) drawn from a looser (pre-tightening) version of the set. The sample broke down roughly into thirds (14, 13, and 13 of the 40, respectively): about one-third squarely on topic for Daoist ecological thought, one-third referring to Daoism only tangentially, and one-third false positives predominantly the *Wuwei* homograph and single-mention occurrences of "Taoism" in syncretic religious lists. This exercise is best read as an error-profile rather than a precision estimate; it is what motivated the tightened term set adopted here (excluding the place name and bare "Chinese philosophy/religion"), after which the set contracted from a looser 709 to the 595 reported. Two consequences follow and are carried forward honestly. First, the 595-document set is used for the descriptive scoping outputs only, and those outputs (Section 4) should be read as indicative of broad pattern rather than as precise measurement, given the residual noise inherent in automated filtering. Second, the works selected for interpretive reading (Section 3.6) are screened individually, so residual filter noise does not propagate into the interpretive argument, which carries the analytic weight.

### 3.5. Bibliometric scoping

All bibliometric outputs are computed on the 595-document analytic set, not on the full export, following the conventions established by VOSviewer (van Eck & Waltman 2010) and bibliometrix (Aria & Cuccurullo 2017). Four descriptive outputs are produced:

1. **Corpus profile and annual trend** the growth of the field over time.
2. **Sources and influential works** leading publication venues and the most-cited documents. Local citation analysis was explored but not reported, because inconsistencies in Scopus reference strings made matching insufficiently reliable across this multidisciplinary set; the article therefore reports global citation counts after manual screening (Section 4.2).
3. **Keyword co-occurrence** author and indexed keywords, with association-strength normalization and a minimum-occurrence threshold of five, set to keep the map legible.
4. **Thematic evolution** keyword themes across three periods. The period boundaries are set on the distribution of the set itself rather than chosen for visual convenience; on the present data the set divides into 71 documents through 2012, 126 in 2013–2018, and 398 in 2019–2025, a distribution that both supports a three-period split and documents the field's recent acceleration.

These outputs answer the scoping question (RQ2) and supply candidates for the interpretive reading; they are not asked to settle the interpretive argument.

### 3.6. Selection of works for interpretive reading

Between 25 and 35 works are selected for close reading, drawn from two pools. The first is the 595-document analytic set, sampled along three routes: the most-cited works (the field's shared reference points), the explicitly Daoist works (those foregrounding *Daoism/Taoism*, *ziran*, *wuwei*, *Laozi*, or *Zhuangzi*), and recent works on sacred landscape, pilgrimage, and human–nature relations (favoring 2018–2025 to capture emerging directions). The second pool is a foundational tier selected purposively from outside Scopus the classical sources (the *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi*) and the principal scholarship on Daoism and ecology because this material is published largely in books and chapters that Scopus indexes poorly and so cannot surface bibliometrically (see Section 2). Each selected work is recorded with the reason for its selection and its role in the interpretive discussion.

### 3.7. Daoist interpretive reading

The selected works are read through five Daoist categories developed in Section 2 *ziran* 自然, *wuwei* 無為, relationality/*ganying* 感應, restraint/*zhizu* 知足, and sacred landscape/*dongtian fudi* 洞天福地 and the reading is organized into a heuristic of four tensions (resource/relational, control/attunement, growth/sufficiency, attraction/sacred). As Section 2.7 states, this fourfold scheme is an interpretive instrument of the present article, not a structure internal to the Daoist tradition.

### 3.8. Scope of the corpus and its justification

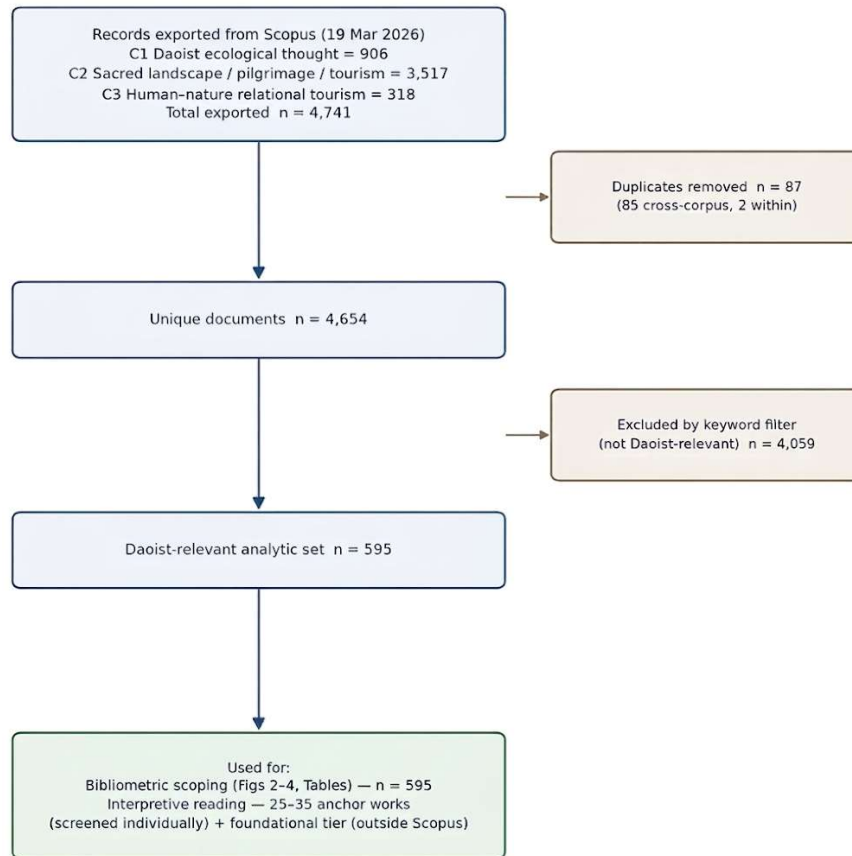
The bibliometric layer rests on Scopus and on English-language records a reasoned design choice rather than an oversight. What it maps is the **Anglophone, Scopus-indexed interdisciplinary conversation** linking Daoist ecological thought, sacred landscapes, and tourism, not Daoist studies as a whole; the scoping claims drawn from it (RQ2) are scoped accordingly, and read within those bounds Scopus is an appropriate and standard instrument. Precisely because Scopus is blind to much of the relevant scholarship, the interpretive layer does not depend on it: the Daoist categories of Section 2 are grounded in classical texts and foundational scholarship that Scopus does not index, and the works selected for interpretive reading include this foundational tier (Section 3.6). The two layers thus divide labor the bibliometric layer characterizes a measurable English-language conversation, while the interpretive layer draws on the deeper textual and scholarly base required to read it.

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Two qualifications follow. First, the English-language boundary touches the interpretive layer as well: although the reading engages classical texts in the original and draws on some Chinese-language scholarship (Chen Xia 2010; the primary geography of Du Guangting), a substantial body of Chinese-language Daoist scholarship remains under-engaged, an evident direction for subsequent work. Second, the article's claim that explicit Daoist ecological theorization is comparatively *underdeveloped* must accordingly be read as underdevelopment *within the Anglophone, Scopus-indexed literature*; the bibliometric layer alone cannot distinguish a genuine gap in the field from an artefact of database and language coverage. The interpretive discussion (Section 5) is what gives the claim its content, by showing that even where Daoist categories are invoked in this literature they are frequently flattened.

## 3.9. Data and code availability

Subject to Scopus licensing restrictions, the search strings, keyword-filtering rules, thesaurus file, the aggregate metadata fields used for analysis, and the figure-generation scripts can be made available on reasonable request or deposited in a journal-approved repository.



**Figure 1. Corpus construction flow**

## 4. Bibliometric Results

This section reports the scoping layer. Its purpose is to characterize the shape of the conversation linking Daoist ecological thought, sacred landscapes, and tourism, and to surface candidate works for the interpretive reading; it is not asked to settle the interpretive argument. Four descriptive outputs are presented, computed with Bibliometrix (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017) and VOSviewer (van Eck & Waltman, 2010).

#### 4.1. Corpus profile and annual trend

The analytic set comprises 595 Daoist-relevant documents published between 2005 and 2025, almost entirely journal articles (550) and reviews (45). Annual output rises from single digits in the late 2000s to 49 in 2022, 77 in 2023, and 111 in 2025 (Figure 2). The growth is recent and steep: 398 of the 595 documents (67%) appeared in 2019–2025, against 126 in 2013–2018 and 71 through 2012. The conversation this article addresses is, in bibliometric terms, young and rapidly expanding rather than settled.

#### 4.2. Sources and influential works

Publication venues cluster in philosophy and religious studies rather than tourism or environmental management. The leading source by a wide margin is *Religions* (58 documents), followed by *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *Trans/Form/Ação*, *Sustainability*, and *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* (11 each), then *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* (9), *Dao and Environmental Ethics* (8 each), and *Asian Studies* and *Asian Philosophy* (7 each). The target journal, *Journal of Daoist Studies*, is itself represented (6 documents). Tourism and hospitality journals are largely absent from the leading venues. This distribution is the first substantive result: the literature engaging Daoism and ecology is carried by philosophy and religion outlets, not by the applied tourism field, which is consistent with the article's framing of the bridge to tourism as an emerging rather than established connection.

The identification of influential works requires caution. A ranking by global citation count is contaminated by cross-field homographs and incidental mentions that survive automated filtering: the most-cited records include papers in polymer chemistry, astrophysics, and oncology that mention a matching token without engaging Daoist thought. Accordingly, influential works are reported only after individual screening. Local-citation analysis, which would better reflect the set's internal intellectual base, could not be computed reliably from the Scopus reference strings across this multidisciplinary set (Section 3.5), so the screened ranking in Table 2 (Panel B) uses global citation counts. Among genuinely on-topic, highly cited works are studies bridging Daoist thought and pro-environmental behavior or sustainability (e.g. Taoist leadership and employee green behavior; Daoist framings of waste-sorting intention; Chinese cultural perspectives on sustainability and harmony) and a philosophical anchor on the ethics of *ziran* and *wuwei* (Lai 2007). The contamination of the raw citation ranking is itself a methodological point: it is why the works selected for interpretive reading (Section 3.6) are screened individually rather than taken from the ranking as-is.

#### 4.3. Keyword clusters

Across author and indexed keywords (consolidated through the minimal thesaurus described in Section 3.4), 51 terms occur at least five times, a density sufficient for a co-occurrence map at a minimum-occurrence threshold of five, with association-strength normalization (Figure 3). The dominant term is *daoism* (154 occurrences). What it co-occurs with is informative. The most frequent neighbors are *Confucianism* (44) and *Buddhism* (43), indicating that Daoism is most often discussed comparatively, as one of several Chinese traditions, rather than in isolation. A second cluster gathers the ecological vocabulary the article is concerned with: *sustainability* (29), *nature* (19), *ecology* (12), *environmental ethics* (8), *harmony* (9), *qi* (7) alongside the classical sources *Zhuangzi* (21) and *Laozi* (13). Notably, *tourism* occurs only eight times. This sparsity must be read with the filter in mind: because the analytic set requires a strong Daoist term, most of the tourism-and-sacred-landscape literature (corpus C2) was excluded by construction, so the rarity of *tourism* here reflects the design of the Daoist-relevant set as much as the state of the field. With that qualification, the keyword structure mirrors the source analysis: the field is philosophical and comparative-religious in orientation, with sustainability vocabulary well represented but explicit tourism and sacred-landscape vocabulary thin even among Daoist-relevant work.

#### 4.4. Thematic evolution

Dividing the set into three periods on its own distribution 71 documents through 2012, 126 in 2013–2018, and 398 in 2019–2025 tracks the movement of themes over two decades (Figure 4). The boundaries are set by the data rather than chosen for legibility. As a share of each period's output, the earlier terms *nature* and *harmony* recede (from the most prominent themes before 2012 to a smaller fraction after 2019), while *sustainability*, *environmental ethics*, and the classical sources *Zhuangzi* and *Laozi* rise in the most recent period (Figure 4). The pattern to be read out in the interpretive discussion is thus a double movement: away from a generic vocabulary of "harmony with nature" and toward both an explicit sustainability/ethics framing and a more textually grounded engagement with the classical sources.

#### 4.5. What the scoping shows

Three results carry into the interpretive discussion. First, this is a young, fast-growing conversation concentrated in the last few years. Second, it is led by philosophy and religious studies, with Daoism most often treated comparatively alongside Confucianism and Buddhism, and with sustainability vocabulary present but tourism and sacred-landscape application markedly underdeveloped. Third, the direct intersection between the Daoist-ecological literature and the sacred-landscape/tourism literature is small (Section 3.3, Table 1). Taken together, the bibliometric picture supports the article's central claim that explicit Daoist ecological theorization remains comparatively underdeveloped in tourism-related environmental scholarship within, it must be repeated, the Anglophone, Scopus-indexed literature this layer can see (Section 3.8), not the field as a whole and it locates precisely where the interpretive contribution of Section 5 is needed: not in restating a mature field, but in articulating connections that the literature has so far left largely implicit.

These scoping patterns set up the interpretive movement that follows. Having established *where* Daoist ecological thought appears concentrated in philosophy and religious studies, comparative in orientation, and only loosely connected to applied tourism and sacred-landscape scholarship, the article now turns to *how* it is framed, simplified, or made conceptually productive once it enters discussions of nature, landscape, pilgrimage, and environmental care. Section 5 takes up that question through the hand-screened anchor works (Table 3), read against the four tensions of Section 2.7.

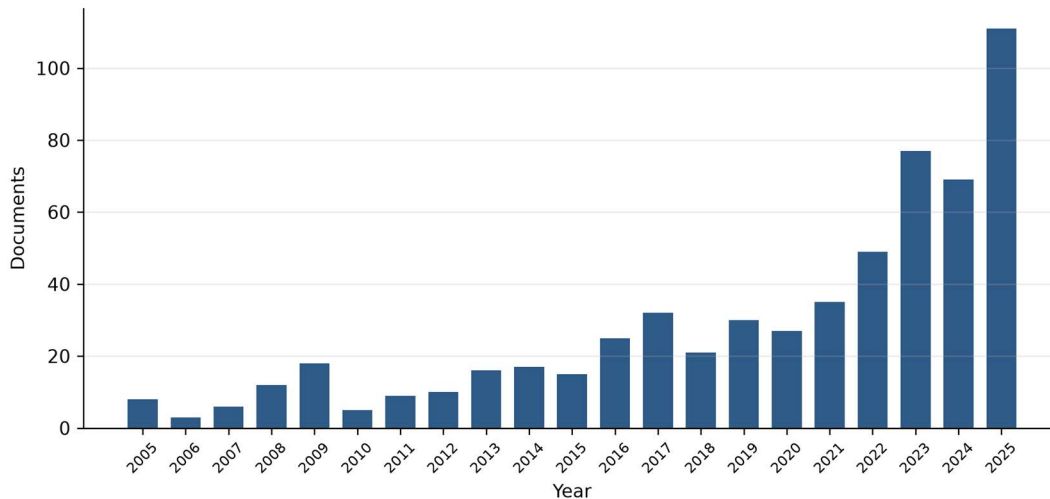


Figure 2. Annual publication trend, Daoist-relevant set (n = 595).

Table 2. Leading sources and most-cited works (analytic set, n = 595).

Panel A. Top sources by document count.

| Source                            | Documents |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| Religions                         | 58        |
| Educational Philosophy and Theory | 11        |
| Trans/Form/Acao                   | 11        |
| Sustainability (Switzerland)      | 11        |
| Frontiers of Philosophy in China  | 11        |
| Journal of Chinese Philosophy     | 9         |
| Dao                               | 8         |
| Environmental Ethics              | 8         |
| Asian Studies                     | 7         |
| Asian Philosophy                  | 7         |
| Journal of Daoist Studies         | 6         |

Panel B. Selected highly cited works relevant to the interpretive discussion (global citations; cross-field false positives excluded by manual screening).

| Work                                                                      | Year | Citations |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-----------|
| Sofield, Tourism governance and sustainable national development in China | 2011 | 109       |
| Xing & Starik, Taoist leadership and employee green behaviour             | 2017 | 102       |
| McCartney & Osti, From cultural events to sport events (dragon boat)      | 2007 | 79        |
| Chao, The power of culture (corporate environmental disclosure)           | 2023 | 74        |
| Li, Sustainability from a Chinese cultural perspective                    | 2016 | 68        |
| Lou, Taoist cultural values and waste-sorting intention                   | 2022 | 66        |
| Lai, Ziran and Wuwei in the Daodejing                                     | 2007 | 66        |
| Lee, A South Korean model of ecotourism                                   | 2013 | 36        |

Note. The works in Panel B are not all Daoist-core texts; several are retained as bridge or contrast works because they illuminate how Daoist, broadly Chinese, or sacred-cultural vocabularies enter applied environmental and tourism-related discussions (see Table 3 for the role each plays in the interpretive reading).

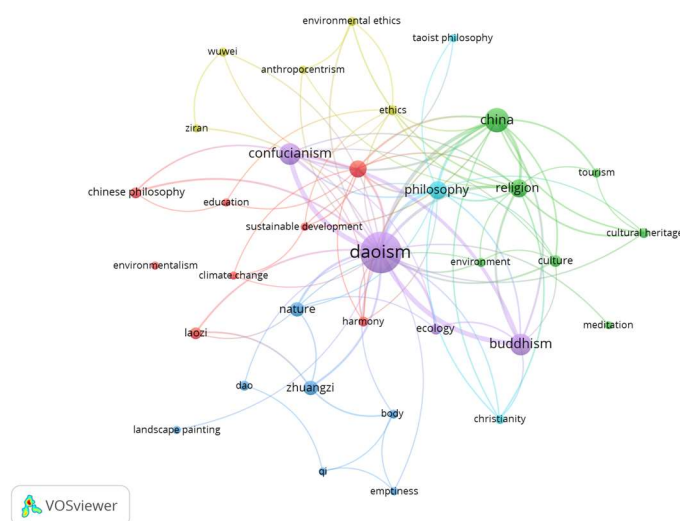


Figure 3. Keyword co-occurrence network

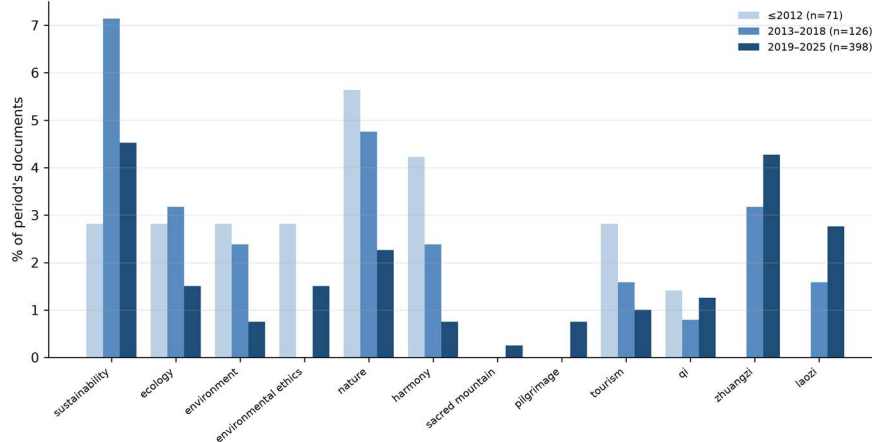


Figure 4. Thematic evolution across three periods (share of each period's documents).

## 5. Daoist Interpretive Discussion

This section reads the selected works through the four tensions introduced in Section 2.7. The reading is deliberately selective and interpretive rather than exhaustive; the works serve as anchors for discussion, not as a representative sample to be coded. Throughout, the aim is to show what Daoist categories make visible in tourism-related discussions of nature, landscape, and care, and where the texts resist, what they do not license. The cautions in Section 2 remain in force: the discussion treats the four tensions as a heuristic rather than a Daoist doctrine and does not claim that Daoism is "inherently ecological" (Kirkland, 2001).

### 5.1 Nature beyond resource

The dominant grammar of tourism scholarship treats nature as an asset: a stock of scenic, recreational, or heritage value to be developed, marketed, and managed. Read through *ziran* 自然, this framing appears not as wrong but as partial. If nature is the self-so unfolding of things rather than a property-bearing object (Liu, 2015; Lai, 2007), then a landscape is first a field of relations in which the visitor participates, and only secondarily a resource the visitor consumes. Several anchor works move in this direction. Xu (2024a) reframes Chinese cultural landscapes as sites where a human-nature bond, rather than an extractive relation, is the organizing ideal; Alexander (2008) reads Daoism alongside systems science to argue for a relational rather than mechanistic understanding of environment; and Ghilardi (2021) shows how the *ziran* sensibility in landscape painting figures nature as a participatory "art of living" rather than a depicted object. The contribution here must be stated relative to work that already moves in this direction. The more-than-human and relational turns in tourism geography (Rantala et al., 2024) have likewise displaced the nature-as-asset frame, so the relational intuition is not itself new; what *ziran* adds is not that intuition but a specific cosmology of self-so arising in which the relation is grounded, a difference of foundation rather than of conclusion, and one that supplies the more-than-human turn with a vocabulary it has largely had to borrow elsewhere. It does not, however, establish that nature possesses intrinsic value in the Western environmental-ethics sense; the move is from *object* to *relational field*, not from object to value-bearing subject (Section 2.1).

### 5.2 From control to attunement

Sustainability is most often operationalized as management: carrying capacities set, flows regulated, behaviors nudged. *Wuwei* 無為 reframes this as a tension between control and attunement. Read carefully, *wuwei* is not a call to stop managing that would be the *laissez-faire* misreading warned against in Section 2.2, but a call to act without forcing, along the grain of a

situation rather than against it (Lai, 2007; Kirkland, 2001). This is not offered as a Daoist governance model, but as a sensitizing contrast that reorients attention from control toward attunement. The applied literature shows both the appeal and the risk of this idea. Xing & Starik (2017), the most-cited work in the set, juxtapose Taoist philosophy with Aldo Leopold's land ethic to theorize a leadership that cultivates pro-environmental behavior through non-coercive means rather than command; Lou (2022) and Chao (2023) likewise locate Daoist or broadly Chinese cultural values beneath environmental behavior and disclosure. Against these, the more conventional framing is visible in Sofield (2011) and Li (2016), where "harmony" is invoked largely as a register of macro-level governance and managed development. The interpretive point is to hold the two apart: an attunement reading of *wuwei* asks not how to govern a destination more efficiently but how to govern it less coercively, and it must be stated plainly that this is a normative reframing the bibliometric record cannot adjudicate. Two points keep this from collapsing into *laissez-faire*. First, an operational criterion follows from the Cook Ding image (Section 2.2): *wuwei* presupposes supremely skilled attention, so non-intervention is licensed only *after* a site's "seams" are understood, never *in place of* understanding them. This distinguishes attunement from neglect and aligns it with adaptive and regenerative-tourism governance rather than with deregulation. Second, the caution is built in: "non-coercive" governance at a fragile site is not the abandonment of protection.

### 5.3 Sacred landscapes beyond attractions

The richest cluster of anchor works concerns sacred landscape, and here the Daoist contribution is most specific. The conventional tourism frame renders a sacred mountain as an attraction: a destination with heritage value, visitor flows, and a brand. The category of *dongtian fudi* 洞天福地 grotto-heavens and blessed lands, each a microcosm continuous with the practitioner's body (Verellen 1995; Section 2.5) reframes the same mountain as a sacred presence rather than a product. The anchor works let this contrast be drawn concretely. Studies of Daoist sacred geography (Gesterkamp 2021; Wang 2025; Xu 2024b) recover the cosmological specificity that "sacred site in general" erases, while Favraud (2022) shows the lived relation in which pilgrims at the Southern Marchmount engage the mountain through the body rather than the gaze. The encounter with tourism is then staged directly by Palmer (2014), whose account of Daoist monks meeting global spiritual tourists at Huashan shows sacrality being produced, contested, and consumed at once; by Kang (2009), where a pilgrimage site becomes a UNESCO-branded attraction across contested religious claims; and by Yang et al. (2025), who turn the Daoist "body-environment unity" against the "technological carnival" of immersive cultural-tourism space. Together these works show that the attraction/sacred tension is not a strawman: the same site is, empirically, both. This cluster also meets an established tourism literature head-on: MacCannell's (1973) account of staged authenticity already theorized the commodification of the sacred, so the Daoist contribution is not to discover commodification but to specify what is lost when the presence of *dongtian fudi* is restaged as spectacle. What the Daoist frame adds is a precise language for the presence that the attraction frame cannot name. The reading should resist idealization here, too. Sacred-landscape scholarship is comparative (Qiu, 2023; DeBernardi, 2009; and Buddhist comparators such as Mount Putuo, Pan, 2021), and Daoist sites are themselves entangled with the state, the market, and other traditions.

### 5.4 Growth, commodification, and ecological humility

The fourth tension sets the growth horizon of tourism against the Daoist measure of sufficiency. Where the field's default is greener growth, more visitors, managed more sustainably, *zhizu* 知足 (knowing sufficiency) and *jian* 儉 (frugality, the second of Laozi's three treasures; Section 2.4) propose a different limit, one internal to flourishing rather than imposed from outside. Several anchor works open this register. Pang (2025) explicitly contrasts Western and Eastern sustainable-

tourism paradigms; Ma (2024) develops an ecotourism framed by Taoist philosophy; Lee (2013) documents an endogenous East Asian model of ecotourism drawing on Daoist, Confucian, and Buddhist sources; and Shao (2017) recovers self-cultivation, rather than consumption, as a Daoist-inflected motive for travel. Read through sufficiency, these works suggest a vocabulary of restraint and humility for debates on overtourism and the commodification of the sacred, the desacralization that McCartney and Osti (2007) trace as a private Taoist ceremony becomes an international spectacle. Here too the point is to differentiate rather than to claim priority: degrowth and post-growth tourism already argue for limits to expansion (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019), and what *zhizu* contributes is a measure of sufficiency rooted in a discipline of desire (Section 2.4) rather than in macro-economic critique a complementary sensibility, not a rival program. This sensibility speaks not only to pilgrimage and sacred tourism but to growth-oriented sustainability paradigms in tourism more broadly, where environmental improvement is commonly imagined as the better management of expanding mobility rather than as a questioning of expansion itself.

This is also where the section must engage its strongest internal counter-argument. Meulenbeld (2024) directly challenges the "harmony with nature" model that much of this literature assumes, recovering punitive rituals and unruly landmarks that show classical and religious Daoism to be far less irenic than the eco-Daoist reading supposes; this aligns with Kirkland's (2001) insistence that the classical texts were not environmental philosophy. Taking this seriously means the Daoist contribution here is not a doctrine of ecological harmony but a set of tensions and humilities, a caution against the assumption that more control, or more growth, or more access, is self-evidently better. Sufficiency, on this reading, is offered as a corrective sensibility, not a program.

### 5.5 What the reading shows

Across the four tensions, the Daoist categories do consistent work of a particular and limited kind. They do not resolve the debates of tourism and sustainability scholarship, and they are not proposed as a replacement for existing approaches (Section 2.7). What they offer is an alternative vocabulary and sensibility: nature as a relational field rather than a resource, governance as attunement rather than control, landscape as sacred presence rather than attraction, and a horizon of sufficiency rather than growth. The bibliometric scoping (Section 4) showed this conversation to be young, philosophically led, and only loosely connected to applied tourism scholarship; the interpretive reading shows that the connection, where it exists, is generative but uneven, and that its most careful instances are precisely those that refuse to make Daoism into a green doctrine. One question the heuristic must not bury is a distributive one. A sensibility of sufficiency and restraint is not costless, and the costs fall unevenly: limits on visitor numbers affect local communities whose livelihoods depend on pilgrimage and tourism income, the daoshi and temples sustained by entrance fees, and pilgrims for whom access is itself the point. The anchor works already register this Palmer (2014) on the negotiation between monks and paying tourists, Kang (2009) on contested authority over a site, McCartney and Osti (2007) on who captures the value of a commodified rite, and read through a distributive lens, they caution that "restraint" can become a demand made of those least able to absorb it. A Daoist-informed reading that ignored this would reproduce, in ecological dress, the very romanticization it means to avoid.

The four tensions are best read in this spirit as a heuristic that, held lightly, helps a dispersed and emerging literature see what it has so far articulated only in part.

**Table 3. Anchor works selected for interpretive reading (hand-screened from the 595-document set), with the tension each primarily serves.**

| Work                  | Title (short)                                                   | Tension                                |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Alexander 2008        | Daoism, ecology, and the new paradigm of science                | resource/relational                    |
| Xu 2024a              | Chinese cultural landscapes: balanced human–nature bond         | resource/relational                    |
| Xu 2024b              | Landscape aesthetics of Jingfu Mountain grotto-heavens          | resource/relational; sacred            |
| Ghilardi 2021         | Chinese landscape painting and the art of living                | resource/relational (ziran)            |
| Xing & Starik (2017). | Taoist leadership and employee green behavior                   | control/attunement                     |
| Lou 2022              | Taoist cultural values and waste-sorting intention              | control/attunement                     |
| Chao 2023             | Confucian/Taoist culture and environmental disclosure           | control/attunement                     |
| Sofield 2011          | Tourism governance and sustainable development in China         | control/attunement (conventional)      |
| Li 2016               | Sustainability from a Chinese cultural perspective              | control/attunement; growth/sufficiency |
| Pang 2025             | Sustainable tourism paradigms: Western to Eastern               | growth/sufficiency                     |
| Ma 2024               | Ecotourism from traditional Taoist philosophy                   | growth/sufficiency                     |
| Lee 2013              | A South Korean model of ecotourism                              | growth/sufficiency                     |
| Shao 2017             | Taoist/Confucian values and travel motivation: self-cultivation | growth/sufficiency                     |
| Palmer 2014           | Daoist monks meet global spiritual tourists (Huashan)           | attraction/sacred                      |
| McCartney & Osti 2007 | Dragon boat races: cultural authenticity                        | attraction/sacred (commodification)    |
| Kang 2009             | Contesting sacred space on China's ethnic frontier              | attraction/sacred                      |
| Gesterkamp 2021       | Shanhaijing and origins of Daoist sacred geography              | attraction/sacred                      |
| Gesterkamp 2022       | Daoist self-cultivation in a Song landscape painting            | resource/relational; sacred            |
| Wang 2025             | Schipper and grotto-heavens: Daoist ecology                     | attraction/sacred                      |
| Favraud 2022          | Pilgrimage at the Southern Marchmount (body–mountain)           | attraction/sacred                      |
| Qiu 2023              | Comparing Buddhist and Taoist sacred mountains                  | attraction/sacred (comparative)        |

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|                  |                                                              |                                           |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Pan 2021         | Landscape sacralization of Mount Putuo                       | attraction/sacred (comparative, Buddhist) |
| Yang et al. 2025 | Immersive cultural-tourism and Daoist body–environment unity | attraction/sacred; relational             |
| Meulenbeld 2024  | Daoism and landscape: unruly landmarks, ecology              | critical voice                            |
| DeBernardi 2009  | Wudang and Mount Zion in Taiwan: syncretic landscapes        | critical / comparative                    |
| Lai 2007         | Ziran and wuwei in the Daodejing                             | (also foundational)                       |

**Table 4. A Daoist-informed heuristic: four tensions**

| Tension                              | Conventional tendency                                  | Daoist-informed re-description                                                       | Anchoring category              |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Resource vs relational field</b>  | Nature as a tourism asset to be valued and developed   | Nature as a self-so, co-constitutive order in which the visitor participates         | <i>ziran</i> 自然                 |
| <b>Control vs attunement</b>         | Sustainability as management and regulation of flows   | Governance as non-coercive attunement, acting along the grain rather than against it | <i>wuwei</i> 無為                 |
| <b>Attraction vs sacred presence</b> | Landscape as a product or an experience to be marketed | Landscape as ritual, embodied, and sacred presence                                   | <i>dongtian fudi</i> 洞天福地       |
| <b>Growth vs sufficiency</b>         | Greener tourism growth (more visitors, managed better) | Simplicity, humility, and a limit internal to flourishing                            | <i>zhizu</i> 知足 / <i>jian</i> 儉 |

**Caption / framing sentence.** The framework does not suggest that Daoist thought replaces existing sustainability approaches. Rather, it identifies four tensions through which Daoist ecological categories can re-describe and deepen tourism-related environmental debates. As argued in Section 2.7, the fourfold scheme is an interpretive instrument and should be held lightly, so that its oppositional form does not flatten the correlative, mutually arising sensibility (相生, *xiangsheng*) that the categories are meant to recover. The fifth category developed in Section 2, relationality/*ganying* 感應, does not appear as a separate tension because it is the relational ground common to all four: each re-description presupposes a field of mutual responsiveness rather than discrete, separable entities.

## 6. Future Research Directions

Together, the scoping and interpretive reading point to four directions in which the conversation could develop.

5. **Daoist ecological thought and sustainable/sacred tourism.** The connection between Daoist categories and sustainable tourism scholarship is currently thin (Section 4) and mostly comparative; future work could engage with it directly, putting *ziran* and sufficiency into explicit dialogue with degrowth, regenerative, and post-growth tourism rather than with a generic "sustainability."
6. **Sacred mountains, pilgrimage, and environmental care.** The richest empirical material concerns sacred landscape (Palmer, 2014; Favraud, 2022; Gesterkamp, 2021; Wang, 2025).

Future research could examine how dongtian fudi cosmology shapes, or is eroded by, the management of specific Daoist sites (Wudang, Huashan, the Marchmounts), and how environmental care is practiced there.

7. **Non-coercive (wuwei-informed) governance and low-intervention management.** The attunement reading of *wuwei* (Section 5.2) suggests a research agenda for governance that works with the grain of a site rather than against it. This must be pursued without sliding into laissez-faire: the open question is what non-coercive yet responsible stewardship looks like in practice, and where it fails.
8. **Commodification, desacralization, and the ethical limits of spiritual tourism.** The encounter of sacred presence with the attraction economy (McCartney & Osti, 2007; Kang, 2009; Palmer, 2014) raises questions of authority and distribution, who defines the sacred, and who bears the costs of restraint or of commodification. This is also where the critical literature on the "harmony" model (Meulenbeld, 2024; Kirkland, 2001) is most needed as a corrective.

A fifth methodological direction follows from this study's own boundary: incorporating Chinese-language scholarship and primary sources, which the present Scopus-based, English-language corpus does not capture (Section 3.8).

## 7. Conclusion

This article set out to map an emerging interdisciplinary conversation linking Daoist ecological thought, sacred landscapes, and tourism, and to offer a focused Daoist interpretive reading of it. The bibliometric scoping showed a young and rapidly growing literature, led by philosophy and religious studies venues, in which Daoism is discussed mostly alongside other Chinese traditions, and its connection to applied tourism scholarship remains underdeveloped. The interpretive reading showed that, where the connection is made, Daoist categories *ziran*, *wuwei*, *ganying*, *zhizu*, and *dongtian fudi* supply an alternative vocabulary and sensibility, which the article organizes into four tensions (Table 4): resource versus relational field, control versus attunement, attraction versus sacred presence, and growth versus sufficiency.

The contribution is offered to Daoist studies in the first instance: a reflexive map of how the tradition's ecological categories are being taken up and reshaped in contemporary applied discourse, rather than a claim about tourism management. Its limits should be stated plainly. The bibliometric base is restricted to Scopus and English-language records, and thus maps onto an Anglophone conversation rather than Daoist scholarship as a whole; a substantial Chinese-language literature falls outside it. The interpretive selection is purposive, not exhaustive. And the four-tension heuristic is an instrument of interpretation, not a structure internal to the tradition, and, as the critical literature insists (Kirkland, 2001; Meulenbeld, 2024), Daoism should not be read as an inherently ecological doctrine. Within these limits, the article offers a structured overview and a focused Daoist interpretive discussion intended to open conceptual ground rather than to close it.

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#### **Appendix A. Scopus search strings**

The three corpora were assembled with the verbatim Scopus queries below, run on 19 March 2026. TITLE-ABS-KEY searches the title, abstract, and keyword fields; each query was restricted to journal articles and reviews in English, 2005–2025.

MAPPING AND REFRAMING DAOIST ECOLOGICAL  
THOUGHT IN SACRED LANDSCAPES, HUMAN -  
NATURE RELATIONS, AND TOURISM: A BIBLIOMETRIC  
SCOPING AND INTERPRETIVE REVIEW

**C1 Daoist ecological thought.**

TITLE-ABS-KEY ( Daois OR Taois OR Laozi OR "Lao Tzu" OR "Lao-tzu" OR Zhuangzi OR "Chuang Tzu" OR "Chuang-tzu" OR "Dao De Jing" OR "Tao Te Ching" OR wuwei OR "wu wei" OR "wu-wei" OR ziran OR "tzu-jan" ) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ( ecology OR ecological OR environment\* OR nature OR landscape OR "human-nature" OR "human nature relationship" OR sustainability OR "environmental ethics" OR "ecological thought" OR "ecological civilization" ) AND PUBYEAR > 2004 AND PUBYEAR < 2026 AND ( LIMIT-TO ( SRCTYPE, "j" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE, "ar" ) OR LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE, "re" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( LANGUAGE, "English" ) )

**C2 sacred landscape/pilgrimage / religious–spiritual tourism.**

TITLE-ABS-KEY ( Daois OR Taois OR Laozi OR Zhuangzi OR wuwei OR "wu wei" OR ziran OR "sacred mountain" OR "sacred landscape" OR "religious landscape" OR "spiritual landscape" OR pilgrimage OR "religious tourism" OR "spiritual tourism" OR "heritage tourism" ) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ( tourism OR tourist OR pilgrimage OR heritage OR "cultural landscape" OR "nature-based tourism" OR ecotourism OR "sacred site" ) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ( China OR Chinese OR Daois OR Taois OR temple OR mountain OR landscape OR ecology OR environment OR sustainability OR nature ) AND NOT TITLE-ABS-KEY ( satisfaction OR loyalty OR "destination image" OR "service quality" OR "purchase intention" OR "revisit intention" OR "online review\*" OR hotel OR restaurant OR "medical tourism" ) AND PUBYEAR > 2004 AND PUBYEAR < 2026 AND ( LIMIT-TO ( SRCTYPE, "j" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE, "ar" ) OR LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE, "re" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( LANGUAGE, "English" ) )

**C3 human–nature relational tourism.**

TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "human-nature relation" OR "human nature relation" OR "human-nature relationship" OR "human nature relationship" OR "harmony with nature" OR "unity of heaven and humanity" OR "tian ren he yi" OR "ecological civilization" OR "relational ontology" OR "more-than-human" OR "environmental ethics" OR "non-anthropocentric" ) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ( tourism OR tourist OR pilgrimage OR "religious tourism" OR "spiritual tourism" OR "heritage tourism" OR "nature-based tourism" OR ecotourism OR destination ) AND PUBYEAR > 2004 AND PUBYEAR < 2026 AND ( LIMIT-TO ( SRCTYPE, "j" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE, "ar" ) OR LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE, "re" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( LANGUAGE, "English" ) )