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A PRISMA-based Review of Taoist Cultural Heritage and the Development of a Heritage and Strategy Matching Guide

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- Cultural heritage
- PRISMA review
- Taoist

Abstract: At present, the research on Taoist cultural heritage has not been well integrated. Lack of tangible and intangible systematic connections. To fill this gap, this study aims to conduct the first structured review of Taoist cultural heritage research published between 2010 and 2024. Systematically collect relevant research through the main academic databases and use the PRISMA guidelines for content analysis. The analysis divides the heritage into two categories: tangible (such as painting, architecture) and intangible (such as music, medicine, martial arts, philosophy), and explores the conservation strategies adopted in previous studies. Based on this result, the study develops the "Heritage and Strategy Matching Guide", which connects five key strategies: documentation, quantitative experimental analysis, scientific and technical analysis, field investigation, and cultural integration with specific heritage categories. Cross-examination of existing case studies shows the practical relevance of the guide and its potential for wider application. The results indicate underutilized strategies and uneven research coverage, especially regarding intangible heritage. This study provides a systematic foundation for further research, promotes multidisciplinary and cross-cultural opinions, and provides beneficial suggestions for the conservation and sustainable development of Taoist heritage.

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INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage is the sum of tangible and intangible traditions, knowledge, artifacts, lifestyles, and values of human society that have accumulated over time and are transmitted to subsequent generations. UNESCO describes heritage as "our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations" (Lee et al., 2022). The term encompasses a wide range of topics, including monuments, texts, artworks, collections, natural landscapes, oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge of nature and the universe, and the skills required to produce traditional crafts

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(Fisher, 2019). Since cultural heritage connects the present with the past and provides a sense of identity, it is imperative to understand and conserve it (Cantillon & Baker, 2022).

Taoism, a significant religious and philosophical tradition that originated in China more than two thousand years ago, is defined by its teachings on living in harmony with the Tao, commonly referred to as "the Way" (Yip, 2016). Taoist culture is an important cultural heritage of China, encompassing a rich history of religious philosophy, aesthetics, and technology (Zhang et al., 2022). Research on Taoist cultural heritage encompasses a wide range of themes, including tangible cultural heritage such as painting, sculpture, and architecture, as well as intangible cultural heritage like music, medicine, and philosophy.

Existing research involves different aspects of Taoist heritage. Taoist temples and buildings are the ideological foundation of Taoism. Laojun Cave is one of the famous representatives of Taoist architecture. It integrates art, history, and technology, demonstrating the value of protecting and sustainably utilizing cultural heritage (Xiao et al., 2015). In the medical field, acupuncture can improve the quality of life for patients with chronic diseases, demonstrating its practical value in modern healthcare (Salome, 2018). Similarly, Tai Chi promotes physical and mental well-being through its fluid movements and sense of balance (Hu et al., 2022). Taoist thought stresses balance, simplicity, and the interdependence of all things. It has had a lasting influence on the culture of China and other countries (Zhao et al., 2021). Furthermore, Zhan (2024) suggests that Taoist music has influenced modern Chinese music, demonstrating how traditional music continues to resonate in contemporary art.

Although several independent studies have examined Taoist cultural heritage, a systematic review of this field is still lacking. Most studies focus on selected tangible or intangible elements. Through a preliminary search of major databases, including Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar, using terms such as "Taoism Cultural Heritage", "Taoism", and "Taoism" in combination with "systematic review" or "literature review", covering publications from 2010 to 2024, no systematic review on Taoist cultural heritage was found. This gap limits the understanding of the diversity and interconnection of Taoist heritage. To address this gap, this study conducts a systematic review following PRISMA guidelines from 2014 to 2024. It analyzes the extent of research on the tangible and intangible heritage of Taoism under UNESCO's cultural heritage classification (Figure 1). It identifies the strategies used in these studies to protect the heritage. The findings provide valuable insights into the protection of Taoist cultural heritage and serve as a reference for future research directions.

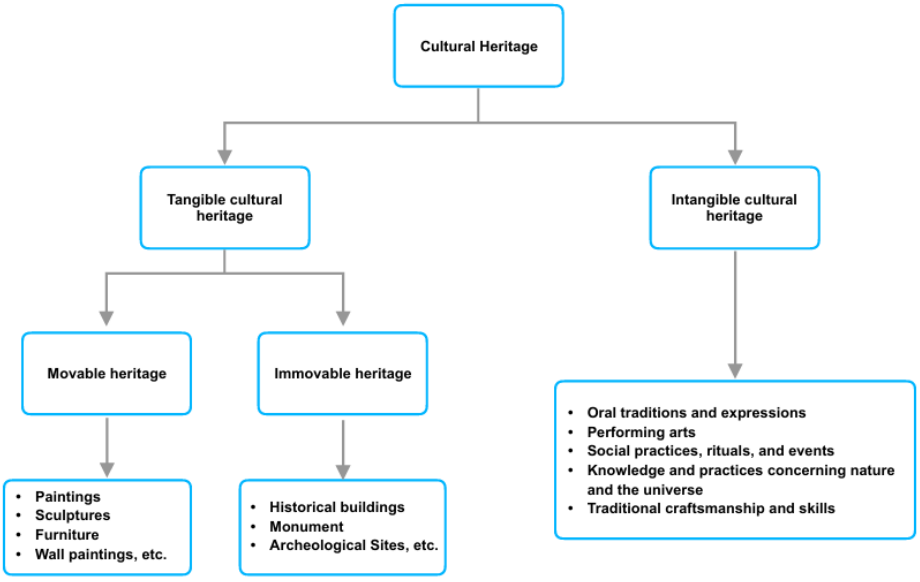

Figure 1. *Cultural Heritage Classification (adapted from UNESCO, 2003)*

This paper is divided into six sections. Section 2 introduces the research methods used in this study. Section 3 summarizes the findings, including the scientometric result, the types of Taoist cultural heritage, and the conservation strategies used in existing research. Section 4 is the discussion based on the findings. Section 5 presents the study's conclusion, and Section 6 proposes suggestions for future work.

To guide this review, three research questions were proposed: RQ1 – What types of tangible and intangible Taoist cultural heritage have been studied between 2014 and 2024? RQ2 – What limitations or gaps exist in current research on Taoist cultural heritage? RQ3 – What conservation strategies have been applied to Taoist cultural heritage in existing studies, and what limitations are associated with these strategies?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to examine existing research on Taoist cultural heritage. Compared with traditional literature reviews, the SLR method is clearer and more systematic, which helps reduce bias and improve the transparency of study selection (Garza‐Reyes, 2015). This study, based on the framework proposed by Kitchenham (2004), was divided into three phases: planning, conducting, and reporting. In the planning stage, the research topic and review procedures are set. The conduction stage includes literature search, study selection, and data extraction. The reporting stage summarizes and presents the main findings.

During the literature collection and screening stage, the PRISMA method is used as a guide (Liberati et al., 2009). PRISMA provides a clear framework for systematic literature reviews and has been widely used in review studies across different fields (Page et al., 2021).

Based on this framework, the data collection and processing in this study are divided into four steps: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion.

Definition of search strategy

The first step in the search strategy is to determine the sources of the systematic review. To obtain a more comprehensive literature coverage, this study searched five major electronic databases for journal articles, conference papers, book chapters, and books: Web of Science, Science Direct, IEEE Xplore, Springer, and Scopus (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Electronic databases*

Database	URL
Web of Science	clarivate.com/products/web-of-science/
Science Direct	https://www.sciencedirect.com/
IEEE Xplore	https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/Xplore/home.jsp
Springer	https://www.springer.com/gp
Scopus	https://www.scopus.com/pages/preview

Creating a set of search thematic axes based on the predetermined research questions was the second phase in the search strategy. Thematic axes 1 and 2 represent the research themes, while axes 3 and 4 correspond to tangible and intangible heritage categories based on UNESCO classifications. By combining these four thematic axes using "and" and "or", the combination strategies employ a structured approach to find and analyze relevant literature. This method ensures that the findings are current and relevant, capturing recent developments and trends in the field (Table 2). This approach helped capture studies that discuss Taoist cultural heritage from different perspectives, including articles that may not explicitly use the term “heritage” in their keywords.

Table 2. *Thematic axis and combination strategies*

Thematic Axis 1	Thematic Axis 2	Thematic Axis 3	Thematic Axis 4
Taoist/Daoist	Cultural heritage	Tangible cultural heritage	Intangible cultural heritage
		Painting	Oral traditions & expression
		Sculptures	Social habits, rituals, & festival
		Architecture	Music
		Caves	knowledge and practices
		Garden	Medicine
Combinations			
Link 1:	Thematic Axis1 and Thematic Axis2		
Link 2:	Thematic Axis1 and Thematic Axis3		
Link 3	Thematic Axis1 and Thematic Axis4		
Link 4:	Thematic Axis1 and Thematic Axis2 and Thematic Axis3		
Link 5:	Thematic Axis1 and Thematic Axis2 and Thematic Axis4		

After finishing the initial search design, inclusion and exclusion criteria were set to screen relevant studies. Literature that met the exclusion criteria was removed. Literature that met the inclusion criteria was retained for the next stage of review. These criteria were used to ensure the relevance and quality of the final selected literature (see Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3. *Inclusion criteria*

	Inclusion criterion
IC1	Sources focus on the introduction of Taoist cultural heritage
IC2	Sources relate to cultural heritage under the UNESCO classification
IC3	Sources written in the English language
IC4	Published between 2010 and 2024

Table 4. *Exclusion criteria*

	Exclusion criterion
IC1	Sources published before 2010
IC2	Sources not written in English
IC3	Duplicated sources
IC4	Sources briefly mention Taoist cultural heritage without providing detailed explanations.

This study developed four quality assessment questions to evaluate the selected articles (Table 5). The questions focused on data reliability, thematic relevance, contribution to heritage conservation, and publication quality. Each article is out of 5 points. Research that scores 3 points or above will be included in the final study. Articles with scores lower than this are excluded. The detailed quality evaluation results are in Appendix 1.

Table 5. *Quality appraisal questions*

	Question	Answer
QA1	Does the research use credible and dependable data sources (e.g., primary Taoist documents, fieldwork documentation, or authoritative secondary sources)?	Yes (+1), no (0)
QA2	Does the study address Taoist tangible or intangible cultural heritage in a clear, focused manner?	Yes (+1), no (0)
QA3	Does the study enhance understanding or practical conservation of Taoist cultural heritage (e.g., strategies, frameworks, or novel insights)?	Yes (+1), no (0)
QA4	At what level of journal was this study published, according to the Journal Citation Reports (JCR) ranking?	Q1 (+2), Q2 (+1.5) Q3 or Q4 (+1) No rank (0)

Following the above search criteria, the study selection and data extraction procedures were conducted according to the PRISMA guidelines (Liberati et al., 2009), including four stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion.

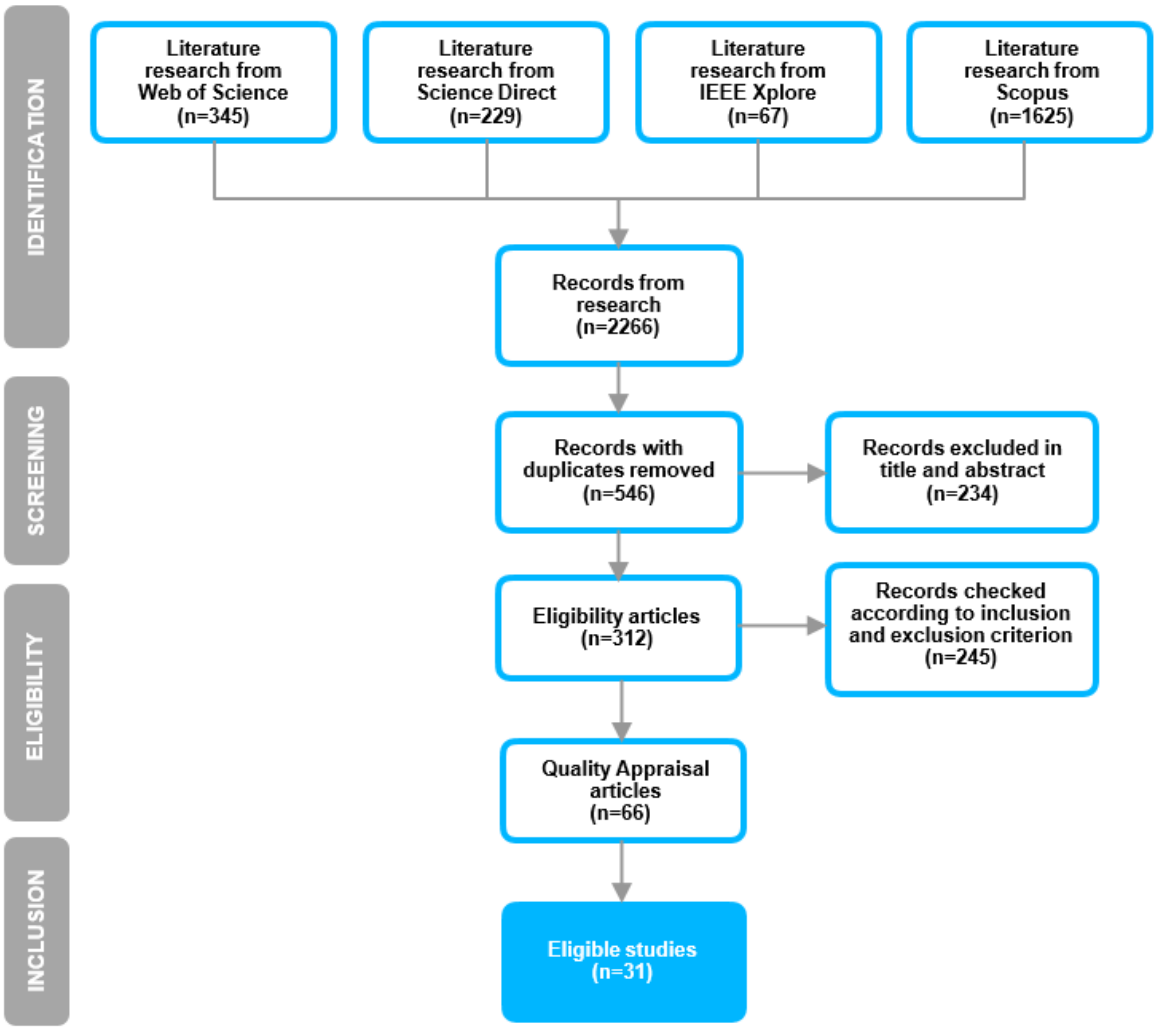

Figure 2. *The PRISMA flow chart (adapted from Liberati et al., 2009)*

Figure 2 shows that during the identification phase, 2266 results were retrieved from the chosen database. During the screening phase, 546 duplicate records were initially excluded. Next, 234 articles were eliminated based on their titles and abstracts. During the eligibility phase, the remaining records were evaluated using full-text analysis in accordance with the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, leaving 66 articles for quality appraisal. A total of 31 studies met the inclusion criteria.

FINDINGS

The reviewed studies were analyzed from four aspects. These include scientometric analysis of the literature, the types of tangible and intangible Taoist cultural heritage, and the conservation strategies identified in existing research.

Scientometric Analysis

For the analysis of the 31 selected publications, the following scientometric variables were used: the number of articles published in each database, the year of publication, the country of the first author, and the ranking of each article by JCR category. These variables provide

insights into the publication trends of the research within the context of Taoist cultural heritage.

First, publications are quantified based on the databases considered. Among the 31 selected articles, ScienceDirect contributed the largest number of publications, with 17 studies, followed by Web of Science with 11 studies. IEEE Xplore and Springer provided 2 and 1 articles, respectively, as shown in Figure 3. The concentration of publications in ScienceDirect and Web of Science shows that these two databases provide broader coverage of Taoist cultural heritage studies and are the main sources for related academic research.

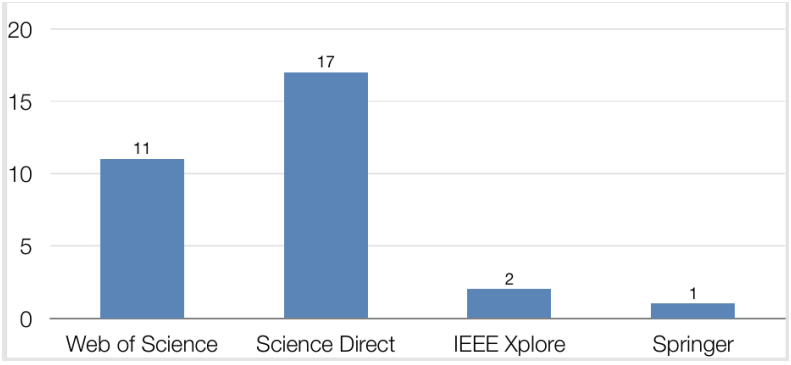

Figure 3. *The quantity of publications on Taoism from reputable journals*

In terms of publication year, the number of studies from 2010 to 2015 was relatively small with little fluctuation. Since 2016, the publication trend has gradually increased, reaching a peak in 2023 with 6 articles published (Figure 4). This trend reveals that Taoist cultural heritage has received growing academic attention in recent years.

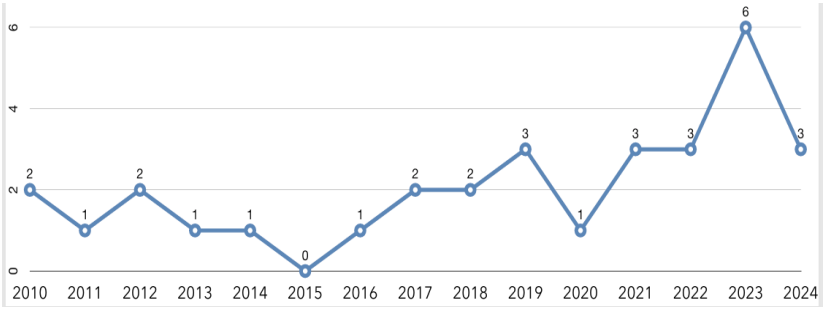

Figure 4. *The year of publication*

Based on the country of the first author, China has published the most papers, with 25 in total. Spain and Malaysia each contributed two studies, while the United States contributed one (Figure 5). The leading position of Chinese authors reflects the strong theoretical link between Taoist studies and their cultural origin. At the same time, the presence of authors from other countries indicates that Taoist cultural heritage has also attracted some international academic interest.

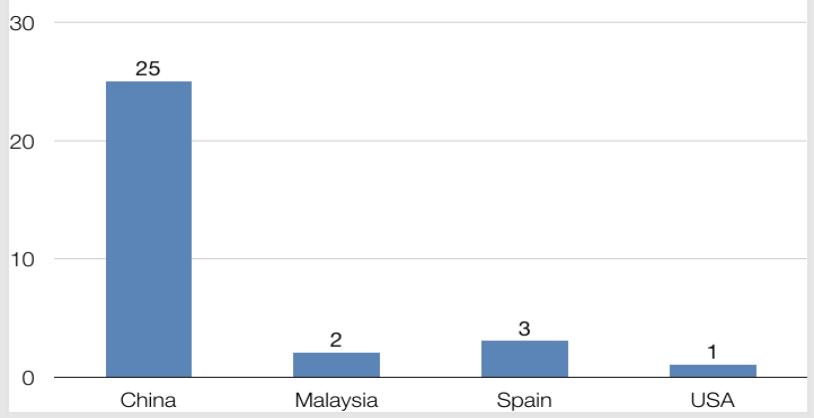

Figure 5. *Countries of the first authors*

The ranking analysis of the journals suggests that 17 articles were published in Q1 journals, accounting for 54%. Q2 journals contributed 10 papers (32%), while Q3 and Q4 journals each contributed 2 articles (7%). As shown in Figure 6, the high proportion of Q1 publications indicates that research on Taoist cultural heritage has appeared in high-quality academic journals and has gained recognition on an established academic platform.

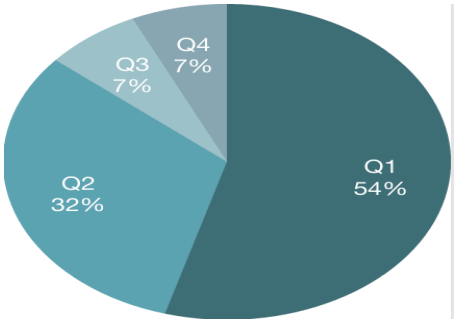

Figure 6. Rank of journal publications

Taoist tangible heritage analysis

Tangible cultural heritage includes immovable and movable heritage. Movable heritage refers to moveable objects, such as artworks, artifacts, and manuscripts. These items are preserved in museums or collecting institutions, where they can be conserved and studied. They often hold important historical, artistic, or cultural value (Permatasari et al., 2020). On the other hand, Immovable heritage refers to structures and sites that cannot be moved, including monuments, buildings, and archaeological sites. This category is particularly important because it embodies the physical expression of cultural identity and history and often reflects the architectural concepts, materials, and technological advances of the era (Covătaru et al., 2022).

The analysis revealed that 10 of the 31 articles focused on tangible Taoist cultural heritage. Table 6 categorizes the themes of these studies. Research on movable cultural heritage includes Taoist paintings (including murals), sculptures, and clothing, while research on immovable cultural heritage covers Taoist architecture.

Table 6. *Classification of Taoist tangible cultural heritage*

Reference	Painting	Sculpture	Clothing	Architecture
Ye (2012)	√			
Lei et al. (2018)	√			
Li et al. (2017)	√			
Xie et al. (2022)				√
Shen et al. (2024)		√		
Yang and Yang (2019)			√	
Yeong et al. (2023)				√
Yeong et al. (2020)				√
Li et al. (2024)				√
Ye (2014)				√

Several major studies of Taoist paintings have been conducted, focusing on analysis and preservation. Two notable articles that focused on mural analysis, Ye (2012) investigated the murals of a Taoist temple from the Yuan Dynasty. They proposed a preservation and restoration strategy based on advanced scientific techniques. The application of BIM technology to the examination, diagnosis, evaluation, and conservation of a wall painting at Wudang Mountain Taoist Temple was covered by Lei et al. (2018). After a technical analysis of four Chinese Taoist priest paintings, Li et al. (2017) discovered that the main fiber source was bamboo, the adhesive was wheat flour, and different pigments were used. Their analysis, which employed a variety of scientific methods, indicated that the paintings were most likely created in the 1830s.

Furthermore, research has also extended to the analysis of Taoist sculptures. Shen et al. (2024) analyzed the materials and construction techniques of two Ming Dynasty polychrome sculptures from the Five-Dragon Palace on Wudang Mountain. Their research revealed the specific pigments used in the sculptures, the multi-layered painting techniques, and the use of drying oil as a binding medium. These findings not only provide an important basis for the conservation and restoration of the related sculptures, but also help date them to the late Ming to early Qing dynasty. At the same time, other studies have examined the other features of Taoist temple architecture. Xie et al. (2022) investigated the unique acoustic environment of the Laojun Cave Daoist temple and found that natural sounds, such as birds, can enhance the overall acoustic comfort of the soundscape. They also noted that Taoists' evaluation of the acoustic environment was influenced by their spatial location, behavioral activities, and religious beliefs.

Related studies have also focused on the materials and interior design of Taoist temples. Yeong et al. (2020) investigated 19th-century Chinese Taoist temples in the Klang Valley. They found that their original design features had gradually deteriorated due to poor maintenance and a lack of awareness of traditional design. The study suggested the importance of

establishing clear conservation standards to preserve traditional design and pass it on to future generations. Based on this, Yeong et al. (2023) further analyzed the roof shapes, decoration, colors, and symbolism of Taoist temples in the Klang Valley. Their research revealed that local Malay architectural styles and traditional Chinese elements are integrated in temple design. This combination reflects the local culture while creating unique architectural features.

Similarly, Li et al. (2024) analyzed the architectural features and spatial locations of Taoist and Buddhist temples in the Chengdu area. They found that Taoist temples were more open in their overall layout than Buddhist temples. This provides a reference for a more comprehensive understanding of Taoist temple architecture in Sichuan. In addition, Ye (2014) studied the architectural form, historical background, and educational significance of the Huixian Taoist Temple, with special attention to its protection and restoration.

Taoist intangible heritage analysis

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) refers to practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills that are recognized by communities as part of their cultural heritage (Lim et al., 2021). This includes oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, and celebratory events, all of which contribute to a community's identity and continuity (Morozova & Morozov, 2018).

Intangible cultural heritage can be broadly categorized into several areas. For example, it includes oral traditions and expressions in languages, narratives, and songs that help to retain the history and values of the community concerned (Lim et al., 2021). The second area comprises the performing arts, such as traditional music, dance, and theater, which form part and parcel of cultural celebrations and rituals (Yan & Chiou, 2021). Thirdly, the social practices, rituals, and events celebrating important life milestones of communities, from weddings to funerals, or even seasonal festivals, represent crucial moments in social life (Alivizatou et al., 2017). Equally, knowledge and practices related to nature and the universe, such as ecological knowledge and agricultural practices, are an important part of ICH (Yu, 2023). Traditional craftsmanship and skills encompass handmade artifacts that depict cultural identity and creativity. This contributes to developing local economies and achieving sustainable growth (Doulamis et al., 2017).

Among the 31 publications analyzed, 21 focus on elements of Taoist intangible cultural heritage. The research subjects are categorized into Taoist music, medicine, martial arts, philosophy, and performing arts, as summarised in Table 7.

Table 7. *Classification of Taoist intangible cultural heritage*

Reference	Music	Medicine	Martial Arts	Philosophy	Performing Art
Xu and Nicolas (2021)	√				
Wang et al. (2013)		√	√		
Ping and Dong (2021)		√			
Vera et al. (2018)		√	√		
Manzaneque et al. (2023)		√	√		

Vera et al. (2016)	√	√		
Chen et al. (2019)	√	√		
Ma (2010)		√		
Xu et al. (2023)		√		
Xing and Starik (2017)			√	
Reinert (2023)			√	
Wang (2021)			√	
Xiong and Ju (2022)			√	
Ye and Yolles (2010)			√	
Xu (2022)			√	
Qi and Yang (2012)			√	
Xu and Qian (2023)			√	
Ma and Li (2024)			√	
Yang et al. (2019)			√	
Du et al. (2011)			√	
Qin and Zhang (2023)				√

In the field of Taoist music, only one study stands out. Xu and Nicolas (2021) examined the music of Baiyun Temple in Jia County and described its history and origin. They recorded and analyzed Taoist music ceremonies, examining the characteristics of both instrumental and vocal music, to preserve and develop this cultural heritage.

The following studies examine the benefits of Qigong and Taoist medicine, focusing on their effects on general wellness and health. After reviewing fifteen studies on Qigong's effects, Wang et al. (2013) concluded that Qigong may improve psychological well-being in patients with chronic illnesses and lessen anxiety and depression. Initial evidence of Qigong's beneficial effects on psychological well-being in this population was presented by their systematic review. Researchers continued to point out that most previous research was of low quality, emphasizing the need for additional high-quality studies. Vera et al. (2016) have provided evidence that one month of Taoist Qigong practice significantly alters immune system parameters in a sample of 43 healthy participants. The changes included an increase in B lymphocyte levels and a decrease in natural killer cell levels; hence, Qigong probably exerts favorable effects on immune function. Subsequently, Vera et al. (2018) conducted an additional study involving 43 participants, who were split into two groups: one group received Taoist Qigong instruction for 1 month, while the other did not. Before and after the program, blood samples were drawn, and tests of anxiety, depression, and sleep quality were performed. The results showed that the Qigong group had significantly lower ACTH levels than the control group. This implied that Taoist Qigong lowers ACTH levels, potentially providing a health benefit. In a study conducted on 38 healthy individuals, Manzaneque et al. (2023) examined the immunomodulatory effects of Taoist qigong. Following a four-week qigong program, participants showed higher percentages of monocytes and decreased numbers of lymphocytes, large unstained cells, and total leukocytes. These findings suggest that Taoist qigong's may produce measurable changes in immune function.

Similar studies have also focused on Dao Yin exercises. Chen et al. (2019) described them as a traditional practice closely related to Qigong. These exercises promote health and prevent disease through controlled body movements, breath regulation, and mental

concentration. Through a review of 12 relevant studies, the authors noted that Dao Yin shows some effectiveness for musculoskeletal disorders, cardiovascular diseases, immune system diseases, and psychological issues. Xu et al. (2023) reviewed 16 studies on Tai Chi and found that Yang-style Taijiquan improves balance and quality of life in elderly patients with gait disorders, such as Parkinson's disease and stroke.

Other literature has examined these two fields independently. Ping and Dong (2021) discussed the philosophical foundations, historical development, and extensive applications of Taoist medicine. They highlighted its role in health and its close connection to traditional Chinese medicine theory. Ma (2010) focused on the role of Taoist martial arts in promoting the values of a harmonious society. It also discussed the influence of Taoist martial arts culture on souvenir design and its application in tourism development.

Taoist philosophy was also used in studies of governance, management, and leadership, not just medicine and martial arts. Studies show that Taoist values, such as non-domination, reflective thinking, and selflessness, have positive effects on raising environmental awareness, handling organizational conflict, and addressing global challenges. For example, Xing and Starik (2017) studied leadership traits based on Taoist thought. They found that these traits can positively influence employees' environmental attitudes and green behavior. This implied that Taoism can serve as a foundational perspective for effective sustainability management. Reinert (2023) investigated how Taoist philosophy underpinned much-needed thematic and ethical perspectives relevant to modern global crises such as climate change, food insecurity, renewed conflict, and increased authoritarianism. Through a critical review of Tao Te Ching verses and relevant research, the application of Taoist principles could lead to the development of more suitable approaches to better governance in addressing such challenges. The applicability of Taoist Yin-Yang philosophy to Western trust-building and conflict management was investigated by Du et al. (2011). The study proposed a moderating model showing that the Taoist principles of balancing self and others, creating harmony, and resorting to indirect actions through relationships rather than power contributed to building trust and, subsequently, leading to win-win negotiation outcomes. The findings showed that within a Western nomology, an enhanced understanding of Taoist philosophy was highlighted through trust and harmony in balanced adjustments, with implications for practical conflict resolution.

After analyzing the application of Taoist philosophy in leadership and governance, it has become evident that it also holds significant value in the fields of the arts and education. In Wang's (2021) study, the author examined the perspectives of scientific community leaders regarding ancient Chinese landscape art. The study highlighted the spiritual aspects of the paintings and the significance of sensory perception. This paper claimed that Taoist philosophy had a profound impact on the fundamental nature of landscape painting. It emphasized the importance of physical involvement and sensory reflection in comprehending its artistic value and in expressing Taoist emotional concepts. Xiong and Ju (2022) analyzed the fundamental principle of 'Tao' in Taoist philosophy and its consequences for governance,

education, and self-improvement. They contended that Taoist philosophy emphasized non-action and teaching through silence, in contrast to conventional methods of learning. The paper suggested that understanding Taoist educational ideas could provide a deeper interpretation of the essential meaning of education. Xu and Qian (2023) examined how Taoist philosophy and Chinese cultural views can be used to rethink the concepts of risk and safety in outdoor education. They analyzed Chinese university students' reflections on their outdoor education experiences and offered an explanation based on Taoist ideas. It provided a new perspective on the traditional Western model of adventure learning.

Taoist thought has also been applied in urban planning, landscape design, and ecotourism. Qi and Yang (2012) found that Taoist philosophy has a deep influence on ancient Chinese city design. This is particularly reflected in the emphasis on harmony between humans and nature and on environmental protection. Ye and Yolles (2010) investigated at the combination of Taoist philosophy and urban landscape design from the view of knowledge cybernetics. They believed that combining Western landscape theories with Taoist feng shui could yield a more practical design method. Ma and Li (2024) explored the possibility of bringing Taoist ecological ideas into modern Chinese ecotourism. They found the connection between sustainable development, ecological civilization, and human spiritual needs. Yang et al. (2019) also noted that Taoist philosophy can help shift environmental education from fear-based guidance to care- and respect-based guidance. This helps build a more harmonious relationship between people and nature. Taoist philosophy was also used in the field of intercultural communication. Xu (2022) used Taoist concepts such as Yin-Yang, He (harmony), and Sanbao (three jewels) to research the relationship between language and cross-cultural understanding. The study was based on ethnographic research on a sailing training trip by participants in an EU exchange program. It put forward the concept of " Dual Harmony of Intercultural Cultivation " (DHIC). This concept helped explain the complex process of intercultural learning and communication.

Some studies also discussed at the connection between Taoism and performing arts. Qin and Zhang (2023) studied the interaction between Quanzhen Taoism, especially the Longmen School, and local performing arts in Shandong and Henan during the Republican period. The study identified eight local art forms influenced by Quanzhen Taoism. It showed how Taoist practices were absorbed, adapted, and recreated in local cultural communities.

Existing studies show that there is still a clear imbalance in the coverage of heritage types. Taoist architecture and paintings have received the most academic attention. Perhaps because they are more obvious and easier to document and preserve (Ye, 2012; Lei et al., 2018; Li et al., 2017; Xie et al., 2022; Yeong et al., 2020; Yeong et al., 2023; Li et al., 2024; Ye, 2014), other forms of tangible heritage, such as Taoist relics, statues, and religious items, still receive limited attention (Shen et al., 2024). This means some important material aspects of Taoist traditions have not been fully documented.

This imbalance is even more obvious in the study of intangible cultural heritage. Music (Xu & Nicolas, 2021), ritual activities, and festive events (Qin & Zhang, 2023) still lack deep

discussion. But these intangible heritage elements are important parts of understanding how Taoist traditions are passed down, how they adapt to local contexts, and what cultural meaning they hold today. Because research in these areas is still insufficient, the current understanding of Taoism as a whole cultural system remains rather fragmented.

Conservation strategies analysis

Tables 8 and 9 list the cultural heritage and related research results. These tables provide a structured analysis and help to understand the preservation strategies applied in the research.

Table 8. *Taoist tangible cultural heritage and research results*

Reference	Cultural Heritage	Research result
Ye (2012)	Murals of a Taoist Temple from the Yuan Dynasty	Advanced techniques, including cleaning and protective coatings.
Lei et al. (2018)	Wall Painting at Wudang Mountain Taoist Temple	Application of BIM for examination and conservation, including digital model creation for assessment.
Li et al. (2017)	Taoist Priest Paintings	Material and pigment identification of Taoist priest paintings.
Yang and Yang (2019)	Taoist Dress Culture	Exploration of historical development in Taoist clothing.
Xie et al. (2022)	Acoustic Environment of Laojundong Taoist Temple	The influence of natural elements on the acoustic environment of the Taoist Temple.
Shen et al. (2024)	Ming Dynasty Polychrome Sculptures	Insights into material preservation techniques for protecting pigments and layers.
Yeong et al. (2023)	Taoist Temples in Klang Valley	Preservation of traditional Chinese and local Malay architectural elements.
Yeong et al. (2020)	Taoist Temples in Klang Valley	Emphasis on restoration standards to maintain traditional features.
Li et al. (2024)	Taoist Temples in Chengdu	Exploration of Architectural features of Taoist and Buddhist temples.
Ye (2014)	Huixian Taoist Temple's Heritage Buildings	Preservation and restoration of buildings, including structural reinforcement and educational initiatives.

Table 9. *Taoist intangible cultural heritage and research results*

Reference	Cultural Heritage	Research result
Xu and Nicolas (2021)	Taoist music	Preservation through recording and analysis of music ceremonies.
Wang et al. (2013)	Taoist Qigong	Systematic review of Qigong studies, suggesting its benefits for psychological well-being.
Ping and Dong (2021)	Taoist medicine	Systematic review of holistic health in Taoist medicine integrated with traditional Chinese medicine.
Vera et al. (2018)	Taoist Qigong	Identification of the effect of Taoist Qigong on regulating ACTH levels in the body.
Manzaneque et al. (2023)	Taoist Qigong	Detection of changes in immune parameters after Qigong practice.
Vera et al. (2016)	Taoist Qigong	Demonstration of immune changes after Qigong practice.

Chen et al. (2019)	Taoist Qigong	Review of Qigong effectiveness for various health conditions.
Ma (2010)	Taoist Qigong	Investigation of the role of martial arts in promoting harmonious societies.
Xu et al. (2023)	Taoist martial arts	Identification of Tai Chi interventions that enhance postural balance in patients with gait problems.
Xing and Starik (2017)	Taoist philosophy	Promotion of environmental awareness through Taoist leadership principles.
Reinert (2023)	Taoist philosophy	Application of Taoist principles for addressing global crises.
Wang (2021)	Taoist philosophy	Emphasis on spiritual aspects in landscape art influenced by Taoist philosophy.
Xiong and Ju (2022)	Taoist philosophy	Integration of Taoist philosophy into the exploration of the essence of education.
Ye and Yolles (2010)	Taoist fengshui	A combination of Taoist feng shui with Western landscape design theory.
Xu (2022)	Taoist philosophy	Application of Taoist philosophy in intercultural communication and understanding.
Qi and Yang (2012)	Taoist philosophy	Integration of Taoist philosophy in urban planning for environmental harmony.
Xu and Qian (2023)	Taoist philosophy	Reinterpretation of outdoor education through Taoist principles.
Ma and Li (2024)	Taoist philosophy	Integration of Taoist ecological ideology into modern ecotourism.
Yang et al. (2019	Taoist philosophy	Improvement of attitudes toward nature through Taoist philosophy and environmental education.
Du et al. (2011)	Taoist philosophy	Enhancing trust and resolving conflicts through the Yin-Yang philosophy.
Qin and Zhang (2023)	Taoist performing arts	Analysis of the influence of Quanzhen Taoism on regional performing arts.

Based on Tables 8 and 9, the conservation strategies in the research can be grouped into five types (Table 10): documentation and analysis, quantitative experimental analysis, scientific and technical analysis, field investigation, and cultural integration. These strategies support the preservation and ongoing development of Taoist cultural heritage in different ways.

Table 10. *Taoist cultural heritage conservation strategies*

Strategy	Reference
Documentation and Analysis	Wang et al. (2013), Chen et al. (2019), Ping and Dong (2021)
Quantitative Experimental Analysis	Vera et al. (2016), Vera et al. (2018), Manzaneque et al. (2023), Xu et al. (2023)
Scientific and Technical Analysis	Ye (2012); Li et al. (2017); Shen et al. (2024); Lei et al. (2018)
Field Investigation	Xie et al. (2022), Yeong et al. (2020), Yeong et al. (2023), Li et al. (2024), Ye (2014), Xu and Nicolas (2021), Qin and Zhang (2023)
Cultural Integration	Ma (2010), Xing and Starik (2017), Reinert (2023), Du et al. (2011), Wang (2021), Xiong and Ju (2022), Xu and Qian

	(2023), Qi and Yang (2012), Ye and Yolles (2010), Ma and Li (2024), Yang et al. (2019), Xu (2022)

Documentation and analysis focus on collecting, recording, and reviewing existing information about Taoist cultural heritage. It involves literature reviews, textual analysis, and systematic documentation to build a foundation for future research and preservation (Kung & Kennedy, 2024). Research on documentation and analysis included literature reviews and summaries of Taoist medicine and Qigong, providing an established foundation for subsequent investigations and improving comprehension of Taoist cultural heritage and its significance in modern contexts. (Wang et al. 2013; Ping and Dong 2021; Chen et al. 2019).

Quantitative experimental use controlled experiments and quantitative analysis to examine the effects of Taoist cultural heritage. It provides direct and measurable evidence for traditional heritage studies (Love et al., 2022). In existing studies, this method is mainly used in research on Taoist Qigong. Researchers observe participants and analyze their physiological indicators. These studies showed that Taoist Qigong has various regulatory effects on the human body. The results indicated that Taoist Qigong has some potential benefits in reducing stress, improving blood circulation, and increasing mental clarity and showed that quantitative experiments can verify the positive effects of Qigong practice from both physical and psychological aspects (Vera et al., 2016; Vera et al., 2018; Manzaneque et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2023).

Scientific methods use tools such as material analysis, dating techniques, and diagnostic technologies to study the physical features of Taoist artifacts, paintings, and buildings. These methods helped support more accurate conservation decisions and cultural interpretation (Li & Yu, 2023). In related studies, this approach has been used to analyze the material composition, pigment characteristics, and estimated age of Taoist sculptures and murals. Based on these data, researchers put forward targeted conservation and long-term maintenance recommendations. This provided a technical basis for the restoration of related cultural heritage (Ye, 2012; Li et al., 2017; Shen et al., 2024; Lei et al., 2018).

Field investigation focuses on on-site observation and recording in the real settings where the Taoist heritage is located. It helped clarify the architectural context, spatial environment, and the current state of preservation. It also provided more context-based data for both tangible and intangible heritage (Lawless & Silva, 2016). Using this approach, some studies examined the acoustic environments and the geographical locations of Taoist temples. They aimed to identify the unique features of Taoist architecture in terms of spatial layout and environmental experience (Xie et al., 2022; Ye, 2014). Studies on Taoist temples in Malaysia and China also showed that temple design is closely linked to local cultural styles and historical settings (Yeong et al., 2020; Yeong et al., 2023; Li et al., 2024). In addition, intangible cultural heritage such as Taoist music and local performances has been documented through field surveys. This helped present the current state of preservation and practice of these traditions (Xu & Nicolas, 2021; Qin & Zhang, 2023).

Cultural integration focuses on combining Taoist cultural heritage with contemporary social practices, other cultural traditions, and modern knowledge systems. This helps Taoist heritage gain new interpretations and applications in current social contexts (Danso, 2014). In existing studies, this approach is mainly seen in the modern extension of Taoist philosophy. Some studies tried to apply Taoist principles to global issues such as climate change. They also explored the role of Taoist ideas in employee management and organizational conflict resolution (Xing & Starik, 2017; Reinert, 2023; Du et al., 2011). At the same time, Taoist thought has been brought into studies on education and cross-cultural communication. It used to rethink outdoor education, environmental education, and the nature of education itself (Xu & Qian, 2023; Xiong & Ju, 2022; Xu, 2022). In urban planning and landscape design, the Taoist idea of harmony between humans and nature was also seen as an important theoretical resource (Qi & Yang, 2012; Ye & Yolles, 2010; Yang et al., 2019). In addition, Taoist ecological thought and martial arts culture have been brought into sustainable tourism research. This shows their practical value in contemporary tourism development (Ma & Li, 2024; Ma, 2010).

DISCUSSION

In summary, although research on Taoist cultural heritage has been on the rise in recent years, the quantity remains limited. Some existing research has been published in high-ranking journals, indicating that this topic is beginning to attract attention from the main academic platforms. Meanwhile, the authors of existing studies are still mainly from China. This distribution matches the cultural origins of Taoism, but international academic participation in this field is still limited. Future research should be conducted more widely across regions and disciplines better to understand Taoist cultural heritage within a broader academic context.

The review of existing studies reveals that many of them focus on only one specific form of heritage. Architecture, painting, Qigong, medicine, and philosophy are often studied as distinct subjects. The connections between these elements are rarely discussed. But Taoist cultural heritage is not composed of isolated parts. Ritual activities, health practices, and philosophy always support each other. Treating these heritages separately for the long term makes it difficult to explain the meaning of Taoism as a complete cultural system. There is also a clear imbalance in the distribution of research topics. Architecture, painting, martial arts, and philosophy appear more often in the literature. Sculpture, clothing, music, and performing arts receive less attention. Some local ritual activities and community traditions are even less systematically recorded. This means that current research presents only part of the Taoist cultural heritage. Many visible cultural forms are still in limited discussion.

A similar problem exists in the use of preservation strategies. Documentation, quantitative experiments, scientific analysis, field investigations, and cultural integration all provide different forms of support for the preservation of Taoist cultural heritage. But these methods focus on different aspects. Documentation is more about organizing historical

materials. Quantitative experiments primarily yield measurable results at the health and physiological levels. Scientific analysis focuses on material and technical information. Field investigation applies to spatial context and practice backgrounds. Cultural integration is more reflected in the reapplication of Taoist thought in modern society. The problem is that in most existing studies, these strategies are often used alone. They are rarely interacted with, which limits the development of more complete and deeper preservation approaches.

This independent use of strategies leaves some obvious gaps. For example, Taoist martial arts and Taoist medicine are mostly discussed through documentation. Studies on Taoist philosophy mainly rely on cultural integration. In comparison, methods such as scientific analysis and field investigation are rarely applied to these areas. A similar situation also occurs in some studies on tangible heritage. Existing research has developed several conservation methods. But the potential for these methods to connect has not yet been fully explored.

To address this issue, this study proposes a "Heritage and Strategy Matching Guide" (Figure 7). This guide summarizes the conservation strategies already used for different types of Taoist cultural heritage. It also points to a possible strategy that can be extended to similar heritage features.

The value of this guide is that it brings together conservation strategies that were used separately into a single framework. For example, in the preservation of Taoist architecture, field investigation and scientific analysis can be combined to document the condition of the building and its material features. Relevant historical information can be added to the documentation. Cultural integration helps connect architectural heritage with public education or tourism. This combination of strategies provides a more comprehensive approach to preservation compared to using a single method.

Some reviewed studies have already proved that the combined use is possible. Research on Taoist temple architecture in Malaysia and China (Yeong et al., 2020; Yeong et al., 2023; Li et al., 2024) showed that combining field observation with material analysis can more effectively support historic building conservation. Similarly, studies on Taoist Qigong (Vera et al., 2016; Xu et al., 2023) also show that combining documentation and quantitative experiments can preserve the practice process and provide measurable evidence. These examples indicate that using different strategies in a more integrated way is not only practically possible but also reflects the complexity and diversity of Taoist cultural heritage.

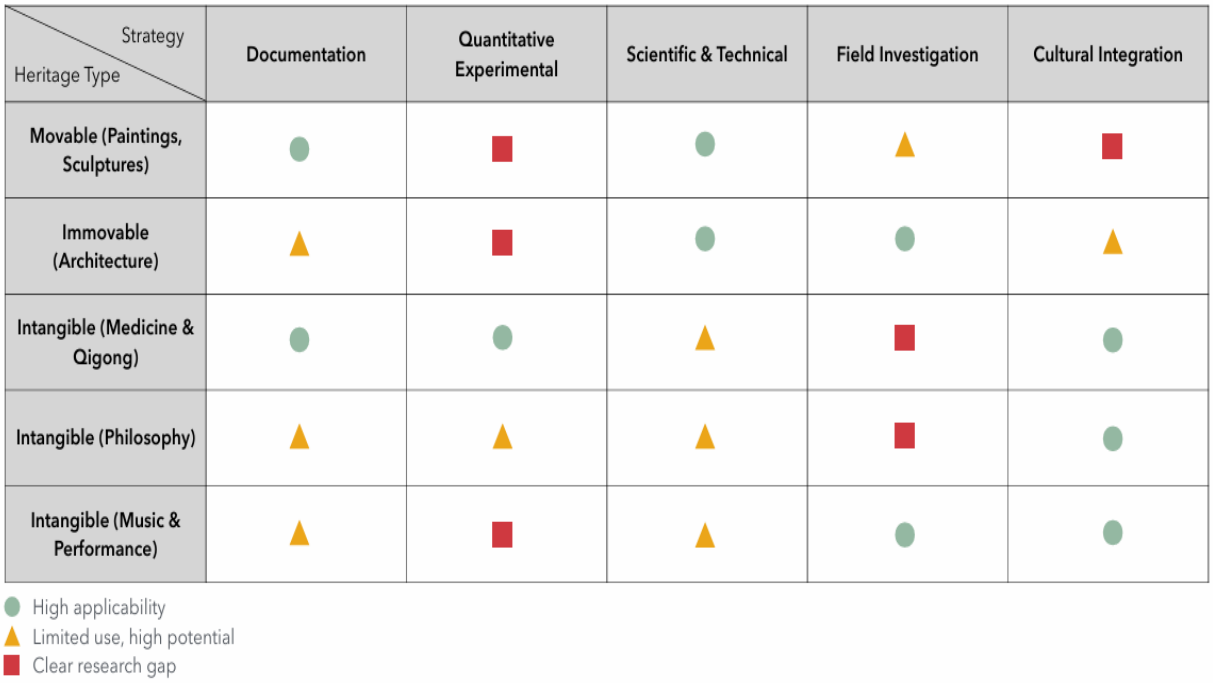

Figure7. *Heritage and Strategy Matching Guide*

CONCLUSION

This study selected 31 articles on Taoist cultural heritage from the initial 312 records for systematic review. More than half of the selected studies were published in Q1 journals, and most were conducted in China. The review was conducted primarily from three perspectives: Taoist tangible heritage, Taoist intangible heritage, and conservation strategies used in existing studies.

The reviewed literature indicates that Taoist tangible heritage primarily comprises paintings, sculptures, clothing, and temple architecture. Among them, paintings and architecture appear most often in current studies. Taoist intangible heritage includes music, medicine, martial arts, philosophy, and performing arts, while medicine, martial arts, and philosophy receive relatively more attention.

Five main conservation strategies are evident in the reviewed studies: documentation, quantitative experiments, scientific analysis, field investigation, and cultural integration. Documentation and quantitative experiments are often used in medicine, martial arts, and Qigong studies. Scientific analysis and field investigation are mostly used for architecture, murals, and sculptures. Cultural integration is more common in studies of Taoist philosophy.

Based on these findings, this study proposed a “Heritage and Strategy Matching Guide” to connect different Taoist heritage types with possible conservation methods. The guide summarizes the strategies already used in the literature and shows where other strategy combinations may be considered.

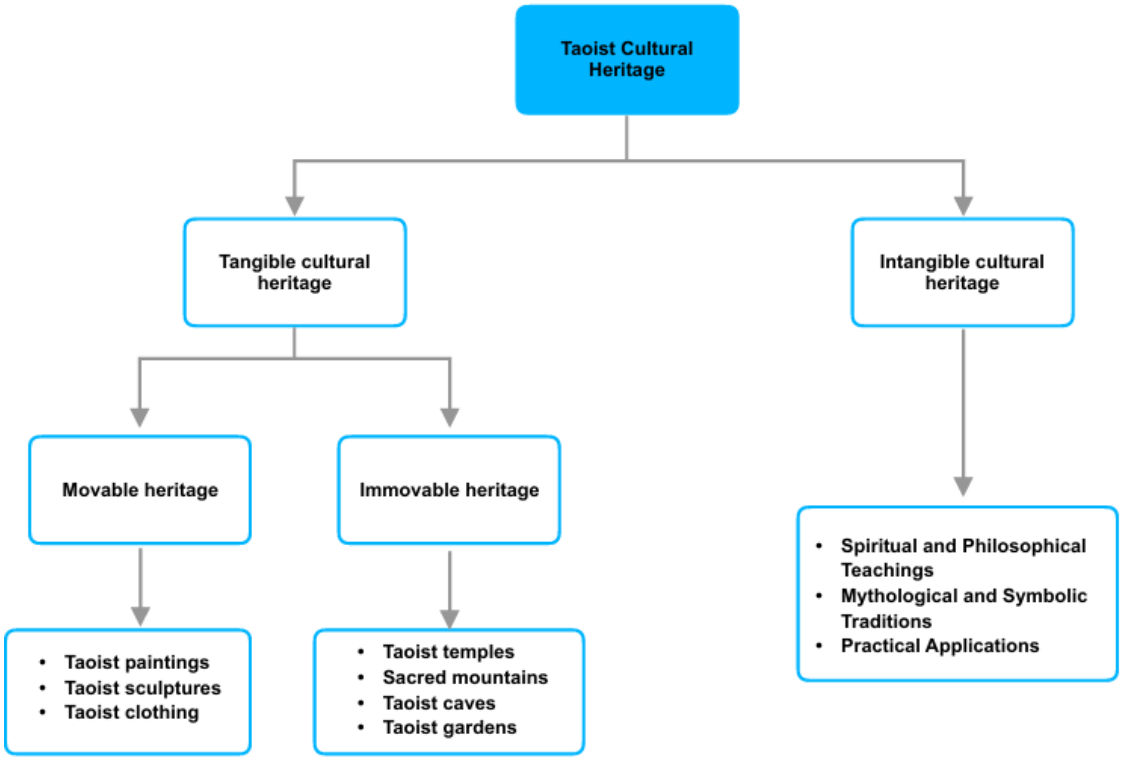

Figure8. *The classification result for Q1 of this research*

Future work

There are still some parts of Taoist cultural heritage that have not been studied enough. Most current studies focus on paintings, architecture, medicine, and martial arts, but other forms, such as Taoist objects, ritual activities, religious texts, and local community traditions, appear much less frequently in the literature. These parts are also important in understanding Taoist culture.

The “Heritage and Strategy Matching Guide” in this study is only a first attempt. It is based on the studies reviewed in this paper, but it is still unclear whether this guide will work well in real conservation projects. More checking is needed through expert review or actual heritage cases.

Another problem is that most existing studies were conducted in China. Studies from other countries are still few, and there is little comparison across different cultural backgrounds. Taoist heritage outside China has not been systematically discussed.

Digital technology can also be used more in later preservation research. Tools such as 3D modeling, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence are not common in the Taoist heritage studies reviewed here. These tools can be used alongside documentation, field investigations, and scientific analysis.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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Appendix A. Quality Assessment of Included Studies

Table 11. Taoist cultural heritage conservation strategies

Study	QA1	QA2	QA3	QA4	Total Score
Banner (2018)	0	1	1	1.5	3.5
Bao & Lin (2024)	0	1	0	2	3
Bao & Yeh (2022)	0	1	0	0	1
Bian et al. (2015)	0	1	0	0	1
Chang et al. (2016)	1	1	0	2	4
Chen & Lee (2016)	0	1	0	0	1
Chen et al. (2019)	0	1	1	1	3
Dong et al. (2017)	0	1	0	0	1
Du et al. (2011)	1	1	1	1	4
Fogarty et al. (2016)	1	1	0	1	3
Guo et al. (2020)	0	1	0	0	1
He et al. (2018)	0	1	0	0	1
Hu et al. (2023)	0	1	1	0	2
Lei et al. (2018)	1	1	1	2	4
Li (2017)	0	1	0	0	1
Li (2018)	0	1	0	1	2
Li et al. (2017)	1	1	1	1	4
Li et al. (2024)	0	1	1	1	3
Lin and Tsai (2022)	0	1	0	1.5	2.5
Liu (2011)	0	1	0	1	2
Liu (2017)	0	1	1	0	2
Liu (2024)	0	1	0	0	1
Ma (2010)	0	1	1	1	3
Ma and Li (2024)	0	1	1	1.5	3.5
Manzaneque et al. (2023)	1	1	0	1.5	3.5
Ping and Dong (2021)	0	1	1	2	4
Qi and Yang (2012)	0	1	1	1	3
Qin and Zhang (2023)	1	1	1	1	4

Qiu et al. (2023)	0	1	0	3	3
Reinert (2023)	0	1	1	1.5	3.5
Shen (2023)	0	1	1	1.5	2.5
Shen et al. (2024)	0	1	1	1.5	3.5
Song et al. (2024)	1	1	0	2	3
Su et al. (2023)	0	1	0	1	2
Sun et al. (2025)	0	1	0	1	2
Tan et al. (2017)	0	1	0	0	1
Vera et al. (2016)	1	1	1	1	4
Vera et al. (2018)	1	1	1	1.5	4.5
Wang (2011)	0	1	0	0	1
Wang (2021)	0	1	1	1	3
Wang et al. (2013)	0	1	1	1	3
Wang et al. (2017)	1	1	1	1	4
Wang et al. (2024)	1	1	1	1.5	3.5
Xie et al. (2022)	1	0	1	2	4
Xing and Starik (2017)	0	1	1	2	4
Xiong and Ju (2022)	0	1	1	1.5	3.5
Xu (2022)	1	1	1	1.5	4.5
Xu and Nicolas (2021)	1	1	0	2	4
Xu and Qian (2023)	1	1	0	2	4
Xu et al. (2023)	1	1	0	2	4
Yan et al. (2024)	0	1	0	0	1
Yang and Yang (2019)	0	1	1	1.5	3.5
Yang and Zhao (2014)	1	1	1	1	4
Yang et al. (2019)	0	1	1	1.5	3.5
Ye (2012)	1	1	1	1	4
Ye (2014)	1	1	1	1	4
Ye and Yolles (2010)	0	1	1	1.5	3.5
Ye et al. (2012)	1	1	1	1.5	4.5
Yeong et al. (2020)	1	1	1	1	4

Yeong et al. (2023)	1	1	1	1.5	4.5
Ying et al. (2021)	0	1	1	0	2
Zhao (2023)	0	1	1	1	3
Zhao et al. (2024)	0	1	1	2	4
Zhang (2020)	0	0	1	1	2