



Zhuangzi's Daoist Wisdom in Modern Psychotherapy: A Systematic Review of Parallels with Mindfulness, ACT, and Morita Therapy

¹Dong Ziyi, ^{2,*}Huang Jiaqing

¹Curator, Ziyi Museum of Living Aesthetics, China

²Research Fellow, Chengdu Neusoft University, China

Email: ¹89236652@qq.com, ²huangjiaqing@nsu.edu.cn

*Corresponding Author: Huang Jiaqing

Abstract- The current systematic review examines how the Daoist philosophy of Zhuangzi can be applied in contemporary psychotherapeutic practices, namely mindfulness-based therapies, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Morita Therapy. Using the Daoist principles of wu-wei (non-striving), ziran (naturalness) and psychological non-attachment, the paper examines the conceptual, epistemological and therapeutic convergences with contemporary models of psychology. The study was conducted according to the PRISMA guidelines, 2020, and reviewed the databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, and PubMed that were published during the years 2020-2025. The results indicate that there is a high thematic overlap between the Daoist wisdom and the main components of the model of mindfulness, the model of ACT, and the one of the Morita Therapy. Findings indicate that the philosophy of Zhuangzi provides a cultural contextual approach to the comprehension of acceptance, experiential openness, emotional control, and meaning oriented psychological functioning. The review also brings out the contribution of Daoist epistemology to the non-dualistic cognition, self-transcendence and therapeutic decentering processes as applicable to modern clinical psychology. The current research work assists in advancing the transcultural psychotherapy research field since Zhuangzi is no longer seen as a historical figure, but as a living philosophical source of contemporary therapeutic innovation. Daoist wisdom integrates into epistemic enrichment of psychotherapy models, clinical frameworks that are inclusive of diversity in culture, and the development of theoretical foundations of integrative mental health practice. The research concludes that the Daoist philosophy offers an excellent conceptual framework upon the formulation of a culturally adaptive, ethically based, and psychologically integrative, therapeutic paradigm in the modern mental health systems.

Keywords: Zhuangzi's Daoism, Acceptance-Based Psychotherapy, Psychological Flexibility, Mindfulness and Morita Therapy, Transcultural Mental Health.

I. Introduction

The process of globalization of psychotherapy has led to the growing interest in non-Western philosophical traditions as the sources of resources to learn mental health, psychological endurance, and adaptive functioning. Recent developments in psychological science have started to acknowledge that mainstream Western paradigms can be unresponsive to culturally diverse conceptualizations of suffering, healing and human flourishing (Christopher, 2014; Cucchi, 2022; Kirmayer, 2023). Daoism philosophy and especially the works of Zhuangzi provide a rich and unexploited source of epistemology in psychotherapy in this regard. The philosophy of Zhuangzi places an emphasis on conformity to the processes of nature (ziran), non-striving (wu-wei), and mental non-attachment, which provides a template of adaptive self-identity and existential plasticity that has some parallels with the current systems of acceptance-oriented approaches (Chen et al., 2020; Gu, and Cai, 2025). Contemporary psychotherapeutic paradigms have experienced a paradigmatic shift to more process-oriented and acceptance-based paradigms and meaning-centered paradigms. Such methods include mindfulness-based therapies, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), and Morita Therapy, which are examples of this shift, with a focus on psychological flexibility, experiential openness, non-judgmental awareness, and value-guided action (Hayes et al., 2018; Hofmann and Hayes, 2019).

The conceptual similarities between philosophical and practical ideas of these therapies, especially acceptance instead of control, engagement instead of resistance, and self-transcendence instead of ego fixation are truly remarkable with Zhuangzi-ian Daoism (Sugg et al., 2020). The works by Zhuangzi have a psychological ontology that opposes fixed dualistic thought, advocates perspectival relativism, and non-attachment to fixed self-concepts all of which are aligned with the decentering process and cognitive diffusion process of mindfulness and ACT (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Moore et al., 2022). Moreover, the adaptation by Zhuangzi to spontaneous adaptation and alignment with the natural flow is similar to the acceptance-action paradigm of Morita Therapy where the suffering is done through functional engagement instead of avoidance or control (Nakamura et al., 2023). There is empirical and conceptual evidence that these non-striving, value-consistent



strategies facilitate emotional regulation, resilience, and existential meaning-making, which are the major therapeutic effects desired in modern mental health practice (Ciarrochi et al., 2013; Gloster et al., 2017; Feldman et al., 2023).

The application of Daoism wisdom of Zhuangzi to psychotherapy has a wider epistemological and clinical implication. In philosophical terms, Daoism provides a non-dualistic model which re-conceptualizes selfhood as relational, contingent and ego-centered. This view has clinically given practitioners culturally based interventions toward the promotion of acceptance, psychological flexibility, and adaptive coping in a variety of population. Interventions informed by Daoism prompt practitioners and clients to develop inner freedom, accept uncertainty, and take meaningful action, which is in keeping with the modern demands of culturally responsive, transcultural, and integrative mental health care ; (Nagayama Hall et al., 2018; Tang, 2023; Keleş et al., 2025).

1.1 Significance of the current study

In spite of this theoretical potential, there is little systematic research investigating the overlaps of the philosophy of Zhuangzi with the current psychotherapy. The thematic similarities to mindfulness, ACT and Morita Therapy have been proposed, however, a synthesis of conceptual, epistemological, and therapeutic analogies has not yet been comprehensively provided. To fill this gap, the current systematic review will review peer-reviewed articles that were written in 2020-2025 to clarify the relevance of Zhuangzi philosophical framework to the modern therapeutic practice. The conceptualization of Daoist philosophy presented in the review as a living intellectual resource can enrich the science of psychology, inform clinical practice, and help in the formation of culturally adaptive, ethically sound, and meaning-focused psychotherapeutic models.

Through the systematic evaluation of these parallels, this paper facilitates the integrative and transcultural approach to psychotherapy, emphasizing the appearance of acceptance, non-attachment, experiential openness, and value-oriented action in the Daoist and Western-based therapies. Therefore, the review offers a theoretical foundation, as well as practical implications of how Daoist knowledge can be incorporated in evidence-based mental health practice to make psychotherapy more holistic and culturally responsive in the 21st century.

1.2 Research Objectives

- To systematically synthesize scholarly work in the current state of the art in terms of incorporating the Daoist philosophy of Zhuangzi into contemporary psychotherapies.
- To critically analyze the conceptual and epistemological points of intersection between Daoist philosophy and modern therapeutic regimens, such as mindfulness-based therapies, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), and Morita Therapy.
- To examine the processes by which fundamental Daoist concepts, such as non-attachment, naturalness (*ziran*), and non-striving (*wu-wei*) help create psychological flexibility, emotional regulation and development of existential meaning in psychotherapy.
- To hypothesize the trans-cultural theoretical framework of integrative psychotherapy mediating the philosophy of the East and Western clinical practice.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the conceptual and epistemological parallels between Zhuangzi's Daoist philosophy and contemporary psychotherapeutic models such as mindfulness, ACT, and Morita Therapy?
2. How do Daoist principles of *wu-wei*, *ziran*, and non-attachment inform therapeutic mechanisms like psychological flexibility, decentering, emotional regulation, and value-oriented action?
3. In what ways can the integration of Daoist philosophy enhance the theoretical coherence, cultural inclusivity, and practical application of modern psychotherapy?

II. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this review is grounded in an integrative epistemological model that bridges classical Daoist philosophy—particularly Zhuangzi's thought with contemporary psychotherapeutic paradigms. Zhuangzi's Daoism conceptualizes psychological well-being as alignment with natural processes (*ziran*), non-striving (*wu-wei*), and cognitive non-attachment, forming a philosophical psychology that challenges ego-centered and control-oriented models of mental functioning (Chang et al., 2020). Recent scholarship reframes Daoism as a proto-psychological system emphasizing adaptive cognition, emotional equanimity, and existential flexibility (Diener et al., 2018; Lei, 2025). Zhuangzi's epistemology rejects rigid dualisms, advocating perspectival pluralism and non-fixed identity construction. This worldview resonates with modern psychological models of self as a fluid, contextually constructed process rather than a stable entity (Ames and Hall, 2003). Contemporary psychotherapy increasingly adopts process-based models that emphasize



psychological flexibility, experiential openness, and relational selfhood, aligning directly with Daoist non-essentialist ontology (Poškaitė, 2017; Normile, 2023; Rief, et al., 2024).

Mindfulness-based therapies operationalize non-judgmental awareness, present-moment attention, and decentering, reflecting Daoist contemplative practices such as *zuowang* (sitting in forgetfulness), which emphasize cognitive emptiness and experiential presence (Baer, 20023; Bishop et al., 2004).

Empirical studies demonstrate that mindfulness enhances metacognitive awareness, emotional regulation, and psychological resilience—outcomes consistent with Daoist ideals of inner harmony and spontaneous adaptation (Guo, 2024; Raugh, et al., 2024; Ueno and Amemiya, 2024). Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is theoretically anchored in relational frame theory and psychological flexibility, refers to an individual's ability to remain in contact with their present and open to their experiences, while engaging in actions aligned with personal values, even when faced with emotional or cognitive discomfort (Hayes et al., 2020; Gloster et al., 2020).

Zhuangzi's philosophy similarly promotes adaptive engagement without attachment to outcomes, emphasizing harmony with unfolding circumstances rather than resistance. Recent integrative scholarship highlights conceptual overlaps between Daoist non-attachment and ACT's acceptance, cognitive diffusion, and values orientation (Soler et al., 2021).

Morita Therapy, rooted in Japanese Zen and influenced by Eastern philosophical traditions, conceptualizes mental suffering as the result of experiential avoidance and emotional resistance (Nakamura et al., 2023). Its acceptance-action model parallels Zhuangzi's view that suffering arises from artificial distinctions and psychological fixation. Contemporary clinical analyses increasingly situate Morita Therapy within acceptance-based frameworks consistent with Daoist metaphysics (Chambers, 2017; Sonoda et al., 2017; Jia et al., 2018).

The integrative framework guiding this review adopts a trans-cultural epistemology that conceptualizes psychotherapy as a culturally embedded meaning-making system rather than a purely biomedical intervention. Daoist wisdom functions as a philosophical substrate that complements evidence-based psychological science, enabling theoretical synthesis without epistemic reductionism. This framework positions Zhuangzi as a meta-theoretical resource that informs therapeutic models of acceptance, flexibility, self-transcendence, and existential adaptation.

III. Methodology

3.1 Study Design

This study followed a systematic review methodology guided by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses) 2020 framework was adapted to improve transparency and reproducibility in systematic reviews and methodological rigor (Page et al., 2021). Its main purpose was to compile the current literature that explored the conceptual, theoretical, and empirical overlaps between the Daoism philosophy of Zhuangzi and modern psychotherapeutic methods, in this case, mindfulness-based interventions, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), and Morita Therapy (Hofmann, 2008; Dijkstra and Nagatsu, 2022). The PRISMA use guaranteed a systematic, transparent and reproducible review process.

3.2 Literature Search Strategy

The literature search was performed across Scopus, Web of science, PsycINFO, Pubmed, and Google Scholar databases and combined philosophical, psychological, and clinical words to implement a Boolean search. The searches tend to combined Zhuangzi, Daoism psychology, and Daoism and psychotherapy with mindfulness therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, ACT, and Morita Therapy, as well as the keywords associated with therapeutic process, including acceptance, psychological flexibility, and non-attachment (Guest et al., 2023). To limit the search to more current peer-reviewed journal articles, the search was limited to those published in English language in 2020-2025. Selected studies were also analyzed in terms of reference lists in order to find other eligible publications.

3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria were the explicit association of Daoist philosophy and psychotherapy, emphasis on mindfulness-based therapies or ACT or Morita Therapy, and a contribution to the conceptual, theoretical, or empirical synthesis of philosophical ideas and therapeutic interventions (Yuan, 2019).

The exclusion criteria were non-peer-reviewed studies, and the studies were not directly related to the target therapeutic models, or they did not offer any conceptual integration. Articles that only covered historical texts on Daoism that lacked clinical applicability were also omitted.

3.4 Study Selection Process

The selection of the studies was performed according to the four stages of PRISMA 2020, i.e. identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion. During the identification phase, a total of 1,123 records were obtained out of the searches in the databases. After elimination of 312 duplicates, 811 unique records were screened at the title and abstract levels. Out of these 811 studies, the total number of studies excluded due to not meeting the inclusion criteria was 664. After this the remaining 147 full-text articles were evaluated based on their eligibility and 83 of them were eliminated based on the lack of conceptual integration, including 20 studies lack of conceptual integration, 28 studies irrelevance to mindfulness, ACT, or Morita Therapy, 25 studies non-peer-reviewed content and 10 studies due to exclusive historical focus. The outcome resulted in the selection of 64 articles for ultimate qualitative synthesis in the current study

3.5 Data Extraction and Synthesis

The information obtained after analysing the articles included in the study covered data on authorship, year of publication, theoretical focus, therapeutic framework, research design, main findings, and the conceptual themes. Thematic synthesis method was applied to determine common patterns and correlations between the Daoist philosophy and modern psychotherapeutic processes (Braun and Clarke, 2021). It was also found through narrative synthesis, which enabled coherent cross-disciplinary interpretation of qualitative, conceptual, and theoretical studies.

3.6 Analytical Framework

The study adopted a comparative philosophical-psychological approach, projecting the major concepts of Daoism, including the term of wu-wei (non-striving), ziran (naturalness), and psychological non-attachment, onto the modern-day psychotherapeutic concepts, namely, acceptance, psychological flexibility, decentering, experiential openness, and value-oriented action (Hayes et al., 2020); This methodology allowed finding structural and functional overlap between traditional Daoist philosophy and contemporary psychotherapy process based on processes, emphasizing common ways of regulating emotions, adaptive functions, and existential meaning.

3.7 Quality Appraisal

Adapted critical appraisal tools used to evaluate the methodological quality of the included studies by assessing conceptual rigor, theoretical coherence and analytical transparency (Guest et al., 2023).

3.8 PRISMA Flow of Study Selection

The PRISMA flow chart to select studies could be summarized as follows: out of 1,123 records identified 312 of them were duplicated and 811 records remained to be screened in terms of titles and abstracts. Among them, 664 records were left out leaving behind 147 full-text articles to determine their eligibility. Following the use of exclusion criteria, 83 articles were eliminated, and 64 studies were used in the qualitative synthesis. This systematic process ensures transparency reproducibility in the choice of a study and offers a strong structure to thematic and conceptual analysis (Page et al., 2021).

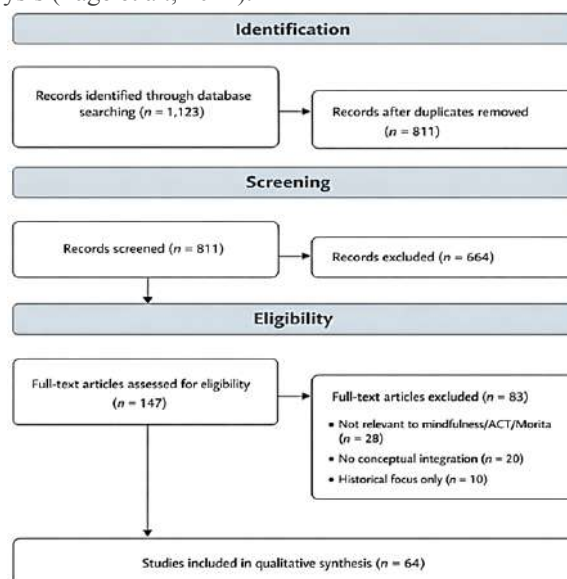


Figure 1. Prisma Flow Diagram



3.9 Ethical Considerations

Since this was a secondary research on published literature, there was no need to seek any form of ethical approval. However, the ethical principles maintained through proper references, theoretical integrity, and cultural sensitivity in the interpretation of Daoist philosophy in the modern psychotherapeutic contexts

IV. Results

The systematic review and thematic synthesis of 64 studies chosen provided the same conceptual and functional overlap between Daoist philosophy of Zhuangzi and the modern psychotherapeutic methods, especially mindfulness-based interventions, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Morita Therapy. It was found to be influenced by five general themes with common epistemological basis and therapeutic processes.

4.1 Theme 1: Acceptance and Non-Attachment

The acceptance became the focal unifying thing within all the considered frameworks. More recent models of psychotherapies understand acceptance as open, non-judgmental attitude towards internal processes and the focus on being willing to approach thoughts and feelings without being afraid of them. Likewise, Daoist thought--as espoused in Zhuangzi works specifically--is a philosophy that includes non-attachment and non-resistance, which recommends that people adapt to the natural way of experience as opposed to attempting to dictate it by force.

The synthesis shows that there is a high structural parallelism between Daoist non-attachment and therapeutic acceptance. Both sides of thinking encourage a psychological well-being by making it less resistant to internal conditions and thereby eliciting emotional stability and adaptive coping. This intersection brings out acceptance as a fundamental mechanism of bridging Eastern philosophical psychology and current clinical practice.

4.2 Theme 2: Psychological Flexibility and Adaptive Functioning

One of the fundamental integrative processes was found to be psychological flexibility. In modern psychotherapy, the term flexibility is defined as the ability to make adjustment in behavior based on the alteration of situation demand whilst staying within the personal values system. This flexible ability is eminently captured in the Daoism philosophy ziran (naturalness) that stresses responsiveness at the moment of spontaneity and fluidity, and situational responsiveness of the environment.

Morita Therapy too enhances adaptive functioning by engaging in daily activities notwithstanding internal discomfort. The thematic synthesis proves that Daoist naturalness is a philosophical equivalence to the psychological flexibility, and both models focus on the non-rigidity, attentiveness to the context, and the dynamic self-management as critical elements of mental health.

4.3 Theme 3: Decentering and Self-Transcendence

Decentering was also an important area of intersection, which symbolized the capacity to view in-depth experiences without identifying them or feeling reactive. Modern therapeutic approaches interpret this process as a change of thinking to a more observational and reflective state of consciousness.

The philosophy of Zhuangzi is furthering a similar point of view by criticizing fixed self-concepts and concentrating on perspectival fluidity and non-dual consciousness. The Daoist relational concept of the self as dynamic is very congruous with the idea in modern psychological models based on the in-religiousness of essentialism that the concept of identity is quite relational. This overlap implies that the two traditions are both conducive to self-transcendence in terms of undermining the firmness of ego structure and encouraging a more supple and expansive sense of self.

4.4 Theme 4: Experiential Openness and Emotional Regulation

Always open to experience was found to be a common therapeutic process. Modern methods propose attention to inner experiences as the alternative to suppression or avoidance, which promotes greater beneficial emotional processing and integration. This orientation supports more emotional attentiveness and control ability.

In the Daoist theory, the focus on emotional control is placed on harmony and equilibrium instead of control or subjugation. Experiences are reflected as emotions, which are natural, and it is not necessary to interfere with natural occurrences to make them become something they are not. Morita Therapy also insists on the co-existence of feelings and intentional action. The synthesis shows a vivid correlation between the Daoist doctrine of affective harmony and the contemporary models of emotional regulation which are based on openness and acceptance.

4.5 Theme 5: Value-Oriented Action and Existential Meaning

The last integrative sphere developed into value-based action and creation of existential meaning. Modern psychotherapeutic models have put value on having meaningful and value-consistent behavior, as a route



towards psychological well-being. Such a strategy does not reduce the emphasis on bringing down the symptoms but rather living on purpose.

The concept of meaningful action in Daoist philosophy views a meaningful action as a concord with the nature and thus the focus is on genuineness and harmony rather than achievement of objectives. On the same note, Morita Therapy combines acceptance with an action of responsible and meaningful participation in everyday life. The synthesis suggests that the two traditions are united into the notion that a psychological well-being is based on meaningful contribution to life whose direction is determined by such intrinsic values as opposed to external outcomes.

In general, the results indicate a great level of conceptual and functional intersection between the Daoist philosophy and modern psychotherapeutic model. In all themes, common mechanisms such as acceptance, flexibility, decentering, openness and value-oriented action come up as defining processes that constitute psychological adjustment and wellbeing. These findings affirm the feasibility of trans-cultural integrative approach that reconciles Eastern and Western philosophical traditions, clinics and provides a better holistic conception of mental health and therapeutic change.

V. Discussion

The systematic review results based on a PRISMA-informed methodology and thematic synthesis prove the consistent and theoretically sound verge between Zhuangzi philosophy of Daoism and modern psychotherapeutic models. Within the five themes found, the analysis demonstrates not just that there are conceptual similarities but structural identities in terms of the epistemological assumptions, the therapeutic processes, as well as the desired psychological effects. According to the research goals, this synthesis makes Daoist philosophy an important but not effectively used intellectual asset of integrative psychotherapy, instead of metaphoric comparison into process-level fit (Cott and Rock, 2009; Cohen, 2024).

Acceptance and non-attachment is the first topic and became the principle of intersect between all models. The current psychotherapy is now more focused on acceptance as a key change process, moving beyond the control-based models to the process-oriented and relationship-oriented models (Rief, et al., 2024; Keulen, et al., 2024).

This direction can be seen in the philosophical work of non-attachment and non-resistance, in which Zhuangzi perceives human suffering not as something to solve but rather as something to interact with in a different way. This coincidence implies that acceptance is not only a clinical approach but a much more general ontological stance in relation to the nature of experience and adaptation (Hayes et al., 2012).

This convergence at the level of central therapeutic processes is further supported by the second theme, which is psychological flexibility and adaptive functioning. The results imply that Daoist concepts of *ziran* (naturalness) have close similarities with the current conceptual approaches to flexibility that are based on responsiveness to the context due to values. In contemporary psychotherapy, flexibility has become more and more considered a trans diagnostic factor within resilience and mental health outcomes. This point of view is reflected in the Daoist teaching of spontaneous, non-rigid adaptation and the use of a clinical technique, Morita Therapy with its emphasis on functional performance despite its internal discomfort (Ziporyn, 2009; Kitanishi, 2016).

These overlaps are in favor of the developing literature that makes psychological flexibility a common construct across treatment methods (Ciarrochi et al., 2013).

The third theme, the de-centering and self-transcendence, provides valuable insights into the way of existing in modern models of self. The synthesis suggests that Zhuangzi and his criticism of fixed identity and focus on perspectival fluidity are quite close to such contemporary aspects of therapeutic construct that include decentering and self-as-context. These theories pose the self as a complex process that depends on a situation and is not fixed but is a dynamic one. This kind of alignment reinforces the cross-cultural aesthetics of non-essentialist selfhood, and is also part of the current theoretical trends in psychological science re-defining identity as dynamic, relational, and emergent (Michie et al., 2023). Additional anthropological and clinical ideas about the developed and modulative quality of the self-experience also affirm this view (Valsiner et al., 2021).

The fourth theme, which is the experiential openness and emotional regulation, continues this convergence to the sphere of affective processes. The results show that the Daoist ideology of emotion regulation and present-day therapeutic frameworks are not viewed as control and suppression but as a matter of openness, awareness, and integration. Based on the harmony with natural processes, Daoist emotional equanimity is similar to contemporary methods, mindfulness-based and acceptance-oriented, that focus on non-reactiveness and experience. The convergence occurs with the results of affective neuroscience, which gains more and more importance in adaptive emotional functioning and emphasizes the role of consciousness and acceptance (Hölzel et al., 2011; Teper and Inzlicht, 2014). In turn, the findings provide an alternative to the classical Western frameworks of emotional regulation and propose different compensatory schemes of regulation based on the principles of balance and attunement.



The fifth theme, which is, the value-oriented action and existential meaning, is the moral and existential aspect of the integration. Modern therapies and especially ACT have adopted the use of value-directed behaviour as the primary source of psychological well-being and reduced a focus on symptom reduction and an orientation towards value-directed engagement in life (Hayes et al., 2012). Equally, Morita Therapy combines acceptance and action-focused endeavor, affirming the significance of functional living (Moskow et al., 2023).

The Daoist philosophy is a welcome addition, as it introduces a counterbalancing view on the importance of being in line with the natural order, where purposeful action derives out of integrity and fittingness and not a set of superimposed goals. This convergence redefines psychotherapy as a moral-existential art, interested in not only relieving distress but also in the development of meaningful and contextually-based livelihoods.

Put together, these thematic conclusions are stronger indicators of the epistemic fit of Daoist philosophy with modern psychotherapy. Instead of an act of cultural appropriation, this integration, instead, constitutes a kind of epistemological complement, where Daoist thinking would add value to psychological science by providing alternative ways of conceptualizing oneself, suffering and healing. The validity of the conclusions made by using a systematic and transparent approach to the review strengthens the validity of the findings based on the fact that the identified patterns were based on the overall and carefully chosen body of literature.

VI. Conclusion

This methodological review reveals that Daoism philosophy by Zhuangzi provides a rationale and theoretically based structure of the explanation of fundamental processes in modern psychotherapy. Using a PRISMA-based literature review synthesis, the results show a substantial overlap between Daoist concepts (non-attachment, naturalness (ziran), and non-striving (wu-wei)) and major therapeutic concepts, such as acceptance, psychological flexibility, decentering, experiential openness, and value-oriented action. Such convergences are indicative of similar underlying assumptions regarding the nature of selfhood, suffering and adaptive functioning and not superficial similarity of philosophies.

This review positions Daoism as an active and useful epistemological tool in modern psychotherapy by identifying the points of convergence between the Daoist thought and mindfulness-based therapies, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), and Morita Therapy. It seems to synthesize that Daoist philosophy predicts key elements of process-oriented therapeutic approaches, especially their focus on openness to experience, situational flexibility, and meaning-based interaction as opposed to the narrow emphasis on symptom reduction. This congruency supports the current move towards psychotherapy as an existentially informed and process-based practice.

The results are also relevant to the development of transcultural psychotherapy because the authors describe the main processes of therapy acceptance, flexibility, and self-transcendence as working across cultures but preserving culturally specific manifestations. In this respect, the philosophy of Zhuangzi would be able to offer a culturally grounded, but conceptually compatible framework to enrich the psychological theory in a manner that does not lessen its philosophical depth.

On the whole, the given study contributes to the development of integrative psychotherapy by creating a systematic conceptual gap between the Eastern philosophical approach to psychology and the Western clinical practice. It helps to build a more inclusive and theoretically coherent mental health paradigm one that is attentive to cultural diversity, based on common human processes, and attentive to the demands of global clinical practice.

VII. Theoretical Implications

The incorporation of Daoist philosophy of Zhuangzi in psychotherapy offers relevant guidelines in the culturally sensitive and process-oriented clinical practice. Such fundamental Daoist concepts as non-attachment and naturalness (ziran) can be used to improve emotional regulation, resilience, and mental flexibility in a wide range of clients. Such values promote the acceptance of internal experiences, decreasing avoidance of experiences, and adaptive coping without pathologizing the distress of the psyche.

Mindfulness-based approaches can be reinforced with the Daoist contemplation knowledge which is built on harmony, balance, and alignment with the processes of nature instead of self-improvement and achievement. Similarly, the Daoist views can be used to enhance Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) in understanding experiential acceptance and the values-based action especially where there is a diverse culture. Daoist ethical naturalism can also add value to Morita Therapy as it helps to have meaningful and context-specific interactions with ordinary life.

In clinical training, Daoism philosophy can be used to enhance cultural competence, ethical sensitivity, and philosophical awareness among practitioners. Systemically, the Daoist-informed models of mental health care promote holistic and flexible mental health care models that focus on balance, adaptability and the sense of existence, which can support more sustainable and culturally sensitive therapeutic approaches.



VIII. Limitations

Although the theoretical rigour and systematic design of this review is quite rigorous, it needs to be noted that there are a number of limitations. First, the research used only English language peer-reviewed journals and therefore might have missed any potential Daoist scholarship and clinical research printed in Chinese and Japanese academic sources. Second, the review incorporated diverse study designs such as conceptual, qualitative, and empirical research design and thus precluding quantitative meta-analysis. Third, a lot of the literature that has covered Daoist-psychotherapy integration is theoretical which has led to minimal direct clinical outcome evidence. Fourth, thematic categorizing can be associated with epistemic subjectivity in the interpretive synthesis approach even though systematic procedures are used. Lastly, there is a danger of conceptual simplification or philosophical reductionism as a result of cultural translation of the Daoist ideas into the western psychotherapeutic models. The future studies should focus on cross-cultural empirical research, multilingual systematic reviews, and clinical trials to approve the Daoist-informed psychotherapeutic models.

References

1. Ames, R. T., & Hall, D. L. (2003). *Dao De Jing: A philosophical translation*. Ballantine Books.
2. Baer, R. A. (2003). *Mindfulness training as a clinical intervention*. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10(2), 125–143. <https://doi.org/10.1093/clipsy.bpg015>
3. Bishop, S. R., et al. (2004). *Mindfulness: A proposed operational definition*. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 11(3), 230–241. <https://doi.org/10.1093/clipsy.bph077>
4. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. Sage Publications.
5. Chambers, M. (Ed.). (2017). *Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing: The craft of caring* (3rd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.1201/9781315381879>
6. Chang, D. F., Ng, N., Chen, T., Hung, T., Miao, I. Y., Cao, Y., & Zhang, Y. (2020). *Let nature take its course: Cultural adaptation and pilot test of Taoist cognitive therapy for Chinese American immigrants with generalized anxiety disorder*. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 547852. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.547852>
7. Chen, Y., Luo, H., Wang, S., et al. (2020). *Preliminary validation of a Chinese version of the Comprehensive Assessment of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Processes* (Version 1, preprint). Research Square. <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-26442/v1>
8. Christopher, J. C., Wendt, D. C., Marecek, J., & Goodman, D. M. (2014). Critical cultural awareness: Contributions to a globalizing psychology. *American Psychologist*, 69(7), 645–655. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0036852>
9. Ciarrochi, J., Kashdan, T. B. & Harris, R. (2013). The foundations of flourishing. In T. B. Kashdan & J. Ciarrochi (Eds.), *Mindfulness, acceptance, and positive psychology: The seven foundations of well-being* (pp. 1-29). Oakland, United States: Context Press.
10. Cohen, E. (2024). The Dao of dialogue: Daoism, psychology, and psychotherapy. *Journal of Daoist Studies*, 17, 99–117. <https://doi.org/10.1353/dao.2024.a920717>
11. Cott, C., & Rock, A. (2009). Cott, C. (2009). Towards a transpersonal psychology of Daoism: Definitions, past research, and future directions. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 28(1), 119–133. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 28 (1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2009.28.1.119>
12. Cucchi, A. (2022). Integrating cognitive behavioural and Islamic principles in psychology and psychotherapy: A narrative review. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 61(6), 4849–4870. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-022-01576-8>
13. Diener, E., Oishi, S., & Tay, L. (2018). Introduction by the editors. In E. Diener, S. Oishi, & L. Tay (Eds.), *Handbook of well-being*. Salt Lake City, UT: DEF Publishers. DOI:nobascholar.com
14. Dijkstra, J. M., & Nagatsu, T. (2022). *Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), and Morita therapy (MT): Comparison of three established psychotherapies and possible common neural mechanisms*. *Journal of Neural Transmission*, 129, 805–828. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00702-021-02450-9>
15. Feldman, G., Martin, S., & Donovan, E. (2023). Psychological flexibility as a predictor of mental health outcomes in parents of pre-school children during the COVID-19 pandemic: A two-year longitudinal study. *Journal of Contextual Behavioral Science*, 27, 116–119. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcbs.2023.01.002>
16. Gloster, A. T., Meyer, A. H., & Lieb, R. (2017). Psychological flexibility as a malleable public health target: Evidence from a representative sample. *Journal of Contextual Behavioral Science*, 6(2), 166–171. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcbs.2017.02.003>
17. Gloster, A. T., Walder, N., Levin, M. E., et al. (2020). The empirical status of acceptance and commitment therapy: A review of meta-analyses. *Journal of Contextual Behavioral Science*, 18, 181–192. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcbs.2020.09.009>
18. Gu, W., & Cai, H. (2025). Tracing the source of nurturing life: A hermeneutic interpretation of Zhuangzi's "Essence of nurturing life." *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 12, 1446. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-025-05827-3>
19. Guest, P. C., Kesharwani, P., Butler, A. E., & Sahebkar, A. (2023). The COVID-19 pandemic: SARS-CoV-2 structure, infection, transmission, symptomatology, and variants of concern. In *Advances in Experimental Medicine and Biology* (pp. 3–26). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-28012-2_1
20. Guo, L. (2024). The correlation between mindfulness, decentering, and psychological problems: A structural equation modeling meta-analysis. *Mindfulness*, 15, 1873–1895. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-024-02395-6>



21. Hayes, S. C., & Hofmann, S. G. (Eds.). (2018). *Process-based CBT: The science and core clinical competencies*. New Harbinger Publications.
22. Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K. D., & Wilson, K. G. (2012). *Acceptance and commitment therapy: The process and practice of mindful change* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
23. Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K. D., & Wilson, K. G. (2020). *Acceptance and commitment therapy: The process and practice of mindful change* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
24. Hayes, S.C., Barnes-Holmes, D., & Wilson, K.G. (2012). Contextual behavioral science: Creating a science more adequate to the human condition.
25. Hofmann, S. G. (2008). Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: New Wave or Morita Therapy? *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 15(3), 280–285.
26. Hofmann, S. G., & Hayes, S. C. (2019). The future of intervention science: Process-based therapy. *Clinical Psychological Science*, 7(1), 37–50. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167702618772296>
27. Hölzel, B. K., Carmody, J., Vangel, M., Congleton, C., Yerramsetti, S. M., Gard, T., & Lazar, S. W. (2011). Mindfulness practice leads to increases in regional brain gray matter density. *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging*, 191(1), 36–43. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2010.08.006>
28. Jia, Y., Li, M., Cheng, Z., Cui, L., Zhao, J., Liu, Y., Leng, M., Li, F., & Chen, L. (2018). Morita therapy for depression in adults: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Psychiatry Research*, 269, 763–771. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2018.08.108>
29. Kabat-Zinn, J. (2013). *Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness* (Revised ed.). Bantam Books.
30. Keleş, F. B., Kesici, Ş., & Ak, M. (2025). Document Analysis from the Perspective of ACT: Values Prominent in Tolstoy's *What Men Live By*. *Research on Education and Psychology*, 9(1), 244-259. <https://izlik.org/JA57BZ22WH>
31. Keulen, J., Deković, M., Oud, M., A-Tjak, J. G. L., & Boddien, D. H. M. (2024). The efficacy of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for transitional-age youth: A meta-analysis. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-025-00543-5>
32. Kirmayer, L. J. (2023). Cultural poetics of illness and healing 22(1), 25–38. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.21012>
33. Kitanishi, K. (2016). Morita therapy related to Eastern views of nature. *Seishin Shinkeigaku Zasshi*, 118(12), 895–902.
34. Lei, W. (2025). Daoist philosophy and leadership: A reappraisal. *Leadership*, 21(4), 265-283.
35. Michie, S., Hastings, J., Johnston, M., Hankonen, N., Wright, A. J., & West, R. (2023). Developing and using ontologies in behavioural science: Addressing issues raised. *Wellcome Open Research*, 7, 222. <https://doi.org/10.12688/wellcomeopenres.18211.2>
36. Moore, M. T., Lau, M. A., Haigh, E. A. P., Willett, B. R., Bosma, C. M., & Fresco, D. M. (2022). Association between decentering and reductions in relapse/recurrence in mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for depression in adults: A randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 90(2), 137–147. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ccp0000718>
37. Moskow, D. M., Ong, C. W., Hayes, S. C., & Hofmann, S. G. (2023). Process-based therapy: A personalized approach to treatment. *Journal of Experimental Psychopathology*, 14(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20438087231152848>
38. Nagayama Hall, G. C., Kim-Mozeleski, J. E., Zane, N. W. S., Sato, H., Huang, E. R., Tuan, M., & Ibaraki, A. Y. (2018). *Cultural adaptations of psychotherapy: Therapists' applications of conceptual models with Asians and Asian Americans*. *Asian American Journal of Psychology*, 10(1), 68–78. <https://doi.org/10.1037/aap0000122>
39. Nakamura, M., Niimura, H., & Kitanishi, K. (2023). A century of Morita therapy: What has and has not changed. *Asia-Pacific Psychiatry*, 15(1), e12511. <https://doi.org/10.1111/appy.12511>
40. Normile, I. H. (2023). Exploring criticality in Chinese philosophy: Refuting generalisations and supporting critical thinking. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 42, 123–141. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-022-09855-3>
41. Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., Mulrow, C. D., Shamseer, L., Tetzlaff, J. M., Akl, E. A., Brennan, S. E., Chou, R., Glanville, J., Grimshaw, J. M., Hróbjartsson, A., Lalu, M. M., Li, T., ... Moher, D. (2021). The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ*, 372, n71. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71>
42. Poškaitė, L. (2017). The embodiment of Zhuangzi's ecological wisdom in Chinese literati painting (*wenrenhua*) and its aesthetics. *Asian Studies*, 5(1), 221–239. <https://doi.org/10.4312/as.2017.5.1.221-239>
43. Raugh, I. M., Berglund, A. M., & Strauss, G. P. (2024). Implementation of mindfulness-based emotion regulation strategies: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Affect Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42761-024-00281-x>
44. Rief, W., Asmundson, G. J. G., Bryant, R. A., Clark, D. M., Ehlers, A., Holmes, E. A., McNally, R. J., Neufeld, C. B., Wilhelm, S., Jaroszewski, A. C., Berg, M., Haberkamp, A., & Hofmann, S. G. (2024). The future of psychological treatments: The Marburg Declaration. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 110, 102417. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2024.102417>
45. Soler, J., Montero-Marin, J., Domínguez-Clavé, E., González, S., Pascual, J. C., Cebolla, A., Demarzo, M., Analayo, B., & García-Campayo, J. (2021). *Decentering, acceptance, and non-attachment: Challenging the question "Is it me?"* *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 12, Article 659835. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2021.659835>
46. Sonoda, J., Takei, M., Takayama, I., Hirakawa, T., Maeda, N., Hatada, S., Kurohama, S., & Nozoe, S. (2017). Comparative study of acceptance and commitment therapy and Morita therapy: Examining the similarities. *Japanese Journal of Psychosomatic Medicine*, 57(4), 329–334. https://doi.org/10.15064/jjpm.57.4_329
47. Sugg, H. V. R., Richards, D. A., & Frost, J. (2020). What is Morita therapy? The nature, origins, and cross-cultural application of a unique Japanese psychotherapy. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 50(4), 313–322. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10879-020-09464-6>



48. Tang, Y. (2023). Daoist freedom, psychological hygiene, and social criticism. *Comparative Philosophy*, 14(2), Article 9. [https://doi.org/10.31979/2151-6014\(2023\).140209](https://doi.org/10.31979/2151-6014(2023).140209)
49. Teper, R., & Inzlicht, M. (2014). Mindful acceptance dampens neuroaffective reactions to external and rewarding performance feedback. *Emotion*, 14(1), 105–114. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0034296>
50. Ueno, Y., & Amemiya, R. (2024). Mediating effects of resilience between mindfulness, self-compassion, and psychological distress. *Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive-Behavior Therapy*, 42, 896–906. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10942-024-00553-2>
51. Valsiner, J., Demuth, C., Wagoner, B., & Christensen, B. A. (2021). The future of cultural psychology: An interview with Jaan Valsiner. *European Journal of Psychology*, 17(4), 322–329. <https://doi.org/10.5964/ejop.7575>
52. Yuan, A. (2019). Courage and well-being in early Chinese Daoist philosophy. *Science, Religion and Culture*, 6(1), 85–95. <https://doi.org/10.17582/journal.src/2019.6.1.85.95>
53. Ziporyn, B. (2009). *Zhuangzi: The essential writings with selections from traditional commentaries*. Hackett Publishing.