



# Non-Action and Acceptance: A Literature Review on Integrating Wuwei from Zhuangzi with Contemporary Anxiety Management Strategies

<sup>1</sup>Dong Ziyi, <sup>2,\*</sup>Huang Jiaqing

<sup>1</sup>Curator, Ziyi Museum of Living Aesthetics, China

<sup>2</sup>Research Fellow, Chengdu Neusoft University, China

Email: <sup>1</sup>89236652@qq.com, <sup>2</sup>huangjiaqing@nsu.edu.cn

\*Corresponding Author: Huang Jiaqing

**Abstract-** The rise in the prevalence of anxiety disorders in the Chinese population and in particular with university students and young professionals creates the need to come up with culturally specific and integrative treatment interventions. Even though the current interventions such as mindfulness-based stress reduction and acceptance-based therapies have been found effective in alleviating anxiety symptoms, they tend to be founded on the Western psychological framework. This generates a disparity in culturally sound mental health practices in the Chinese environment. The current literature review discussed how the concept of the Daoist wuwei (non-action) presented in the Zhuangzi can be integrated with the modern anxiety management strategies. The concept of wuwei emphasizes the idea of effortlessness, non-striving and adapting to the natural processes and encourages individuals to reduce the excessive control of the mind and to allow the flowing nature of inner experience. All these principles are extremely aligned with contemporary therapeutic constructs such as mindfulness, psychological flexibility, and acceptance. The review is an overview of the existing tendencies in mindfulness-based and acceptance-based interventions, which have already demonstrated their effectiveness in assisting to regulate the emotional, reduce rumination, and build resilience. It also explains how the Daoist philosophy can be used to provide a culturally based model that would add insight into these therapeutic processes conceptually. The traditional Chinese philosophy and the current psychology practices will be incorporated in this paper to develop a conceptual integration model that will enhance the cultural suitability and effectiveness of anxiety treatment in China. Its outcomes are that wuwei use in therapeutic practices may result in adaptive coping, reduction of experiential avoidance, and enhancement of holistic psychology. This integration presents useful implications to the development of culturally sensitive mental health interventions, and future empirical studies in the Chinese setting.

**Keywords:** Anxiety Disorders, Mindfulness-Based Therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Psychological Flexibility, Daoist Philosophy (Wuwei)

## I. Introduction

Anxiety disorders are an increasing national health problem in China, especially in universities and professionals at the beginning of their careers who are dealing with social and economic changes at a high rate. Increased academic pressure, employment insecurity and urbanization have contributed to the amount of psychological distress and this is the reason why anxiety ranks as one of the most commonly reported mental health issues in the country. As the recent epidemiological statistics show, the signs of anxiety are rigidly connected with poor academic results, reduced life satisfaction, and reduced psychological stability among China's young people (Li et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2020). These problems underscore the need to have effective, scalable, and culturally relevant interventions to address anxiety in the group. To deal with this growing concern, contemporary psychological interventions such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) have increasingly become popular in China. According to the literature, these types of interventions can be effectively applied in reducing anxiety symptoms since they target maladaptive thinking patterns and emotional regulation within the Chinese communities (Cao, 2025; Belardi et al., 2022). In particular, the mindfulness-based interventions are concerned with non-judgmental acceptance of internal experiences and a focus on the present moment, which has been observed to reduce the levels of stress and enhance the psychological well-being of Chinese people (Tang et al., 2015). Despite the effectiveness of these interventions, they are often founded on the Western psychological paradigm that may not fully correspond to the local tradition of cultural values and philosophies. It has been speculated by researchers that the integration of the indigenous philosophies into the mental health practice can assist in enhancing cultural competence and the treatment outcomes (Hwang, 2006). The Chinese traditional philosophies, in particular, Daoism, possess a great conceptual material to understand human cognition, emotion, and wellbeing in an integrated and context-sensitive manner. The concept of wuwei



(without action) or non-action or effortless action is one of the best concepts of Daoism that is relevant to psychological well-being. Wuwei is a concept of classical Daoist literature since it does not mean passivity but means acting according to the natural order of things without overstrain or power. This principle assists individuals to renounce set anticipations and reduce cognitive over-investment and form responsiveness to evolving realities which are adaptive (Slingerland, 2003). This can be utilized psychologically to minimize the cognitive and emotional processes on which anxiety is based.

Modern psychological theories reinforce the applicability of wuwei even more. To illustrate, one of the models, the acceptance-based, is concerned with allowing thoughts and feelings to come out in their own, and avoiding experiential avoidance, which is one of the biggest processes underlying anxiety disorders (Hayes et al., 2012). Similarly, one of the most important processes during the mediation of emotional resilience has been identified in the psychological flexibility, or the ability to adapt to the situational needs and modify the cognitive points of view (Kashdan and Rottenberg, 2010). These constructs are very similar to the Daoist idea of adaptability, spontaneity, and non-attachment.

The empirical research studies that have been carried out recently in China have shown that mindfulness-based intervention produces a significant effect of decreasing anxiety and enhancing emotional control among students at universities (Belardi et al., 2022). Also, acceptance-based and compassion-based interventions, especially based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), have been found to increase resilience and improve psychological functioning (Buyuksuz, 2025). However, despite the fact that these approaches share the notions with the Daoist philosophy, the connections between the ancient concepts such as wuwei and the modern treatment approaches are not explored in detail. Most of the existing studies focus on the empirical effectiveness of the mindfulness-based interventions, and the philosophical basis of the intervention or its cultural adaptation is not given much attention. This difference restricts the development of integrative models that would enable the most out of the benefits of both Eastern and Western perspectives.

The potential advantages of wuwei in the contemporary stress management techniques are numerous. To begin with, it provides a culturally familiar model of framework that may make therapeutic interventions more feasible and engaging among Chinese communities. Second, it expands the conceptual knowledge of the acceptance-based practices by basing them on a long-term philosophical tradition. Third, it promotes emphasis on a process-related concept of well-being that dwells on harmony, equilibrium and nature. Further, the integration of the Daoist teachings with the modern psychology is in line with the general changes in the mental health studies worldwide, which are increasingly becoming culturally sensitive and contextual. Indigenous knowledge systems may be incorporated into the evidence-based practice to develop more inclusive and more comprehensive mental health care models by researchers and practitioners (Bernal and Domenech Rodriguez, 2012). The process of integration is particularly significant in the terms of the Chinese society where the influence of traditional philosophies on cultural values and everyday life is long-term. Although these opportunities are promising, there is still the need to conduct systematic studies that examine how the concept of wuwei can be applied in present therapeutic systems. It remains a question how the Daoist principles may be transformed into the practical interventions, how they may be related with the existing psychological constructs and how the effectiveness may be empirically measured. These questions are necessary in order to promote theoretical and practical knowledge in the sphere of mental health.

The current literature review will address these gaps by examining the overlap between the Daoist philosophy and modern approaches to anxiety management. By incorporating new empirical data and theoretical knowledge, the research will be in a position to develop a detailed understanding of how wuwei can be applied to inform and enhance current approaches of treating anxiety. It can thus assist in the development of the currently existing literature on culturally integrated psychotherapy as well as provide a ground on which future empirical studies in the Chinese context can be carried out.

### ***1.1 Research Question and Objectives***

#### **Research Questions**

- What are the theoretical links between the Daoist concept of wuwei and the contemporary psychological concept of acceptance, non-attachment, and emotional control?
- What of the current methods of treating anxiety (e.g., mindfulness and acceptance-based therapies) are consistent with the Daoist principles?
- What role does wuwei based thinking play in culturally based interventions to anxiety in China?
- What is the theoretical framework that can be developed to include the Daoism philosophy in the contemporary therapeutic practices of addressing anxiety?

#### **Research Objectives**

- To critically comment on the philosophical basis of wuwei in Daoism philosophy and in the Zhuangzi in particular.



- To gain a deeper insight into the key psychological mechanisms underlying the modern anxiety therapies, including mindfulness and acceptance.
- To locate the conceptual parallels between the Daoist philosophy and the modern therapeutic systems.
- To recommend a culturally flexible integrative model to the Chinese anxiety management.

## II. Theoretical Framework

The study theoretical framework will be based on the synthesis of the Daoist philosophy, i.e. the concept of wuwei, and the theory of contemporary psychology related to the anxiety-management. This paradigm establishes an abstract connection between Eastern philosophy and the modern evidence-based therapeutic paradigms, in particular, the Chinese cultural context. Wuwei is placed in the middle between the conventional Daoist philosophies and can be translated to mean non-action or effortless action. Wuwei does not mean passivity or inaction but it is rather a state of adaptation in which individuals do not act against the natural way of life (Dao) and use as little resistance and unnecessary effort as possible. In Daoism, wuwei refers to action that results of being responsive to the situation instead of acting with effort and contrivance, to such an extent that actions seem effortless and in balance with the situation in question (wuwei as responsive attunement or efficiently through alignment) as opposed to inert passivity. This kind of blind responsiveness can be likened to a state in which behavior and thought is optimized by means of minimization of self-conscious interference and unnecessary control, and the individual action is synchronized with larger and more naturally developing patterns (Xu, 2024). This condition is associated with psychological comfort, which is extremely opposite to hyper-control and anticipatory anxiety which typify anxiety disorders.

In modern psychology, the notion of anxiety can be described as the outcome of maladaptive cognition, including excessive worry, having problems with tolerating uncertainty, and avoiding feelings. New developments in clinical science stress process-based interventions, which consider core psychological processes as the basis of anxiety development and maintenance: experiential avoidance and cognitive fusion (Hofmann and Hayes, 2019). These are processes that include efforts to regulate or suppress inner experiences which eventually worsen distress.

An alternative conceptual perspective is the Daoist principle of wuwei which lays stress on non-intervention and allowing internal experiences. This aspect of view is quite near the psychological construct of decentering, i.e. viewing thoughts and feelings without being identified with them. Decentering was identified to decrease anxiety as it interferes with maladaptive cognitive loops and enhances adaptive emotional regulation (Fresco et al., 2007). Similarly, neurocognitive research has demonstrated that lower cognitive reactivity, one of the consequences of acceptance-based practices, is extremely important in mitigating the effects of the anxiety symptoms through breaking an established pattern of thought and enhancing the capacity to control the emotions (Raes et al., 2009).

The other important construct used in this framework is psychological flexibility that is defined as the capability to react to the varying situational demands without being rigid to the internal experiences. Psychological flexibility is the important process of the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and other interventions. Due to the empirical evidence, it is possible to state that more psychologically flexible people have lower anxiety and higher resilience (Gur and Reich, 2023). This flexibility according to Daoist perspective is likened to the wuwei that is movable and adjustable where individuals are sensitive to circumstances in life without following some outcome rigorously.

The topicality of the flexibility among the Chinese populations is also justified by the new cross-cultural research. To provide an example, the findings demonstrate that culturally adapted mindfulness and acceptance-based interventions can improve emotional regulation and reduce the symptoms of anxiety through the improvement of adaptive coping abilities (Li et al., 2023). This is the reason why therapeutic ideas such as wuwei which carry a certain cultural appeal ought to be integrated within the therapeutic set up to enhance their effectiveness.

The other important aspect of the theoretical framework is mindfulness. The present-moment awareness, which is not judgmental and critical and is known as mindfulness, has been widely established to be a valuable treatment of anxiety. The research has demonstrated that mindfulness reduces the level of anxiety simulating rumination, attentional control, and increasing emotional awareness (Querstret et al., 2017). Moreover, longitudinal studies indicate that mindfulness training may lead to a long-term reduction in anxiety levels due to a shift in the habitual thinking patterns and enhancement of the emotional regulation (Goldberg et al., 2018).

Even though mindfulness is closely connected to the Buddhism tradition, its implementation to Daoism offers a wider range of source of culture and conceptualization. The Daoism traditions also emphasize on harmony with nature and mindfulness easily that aids the attentional and acceptance-based elements of mindfulness. Scholars have suggested that it is possible to add Daoist perspectives and other indigenous philosophical theories in mindfulness-based interventions to improve their philosophical background and cultural relevance particularly in non-Western nations such as China (Du and Ning, 2024).



Non-attachment is another significant concept that can be used to relate the Daoist philosophy to the modern psychology. Non-attachment psychologically is elastic and harmonious relationship with thoughts, feelings and external conditions. Empirical research indicates that less psychological distress, less stress, and more life satisfaction and well-being are connected with non-attachment (Whitehead et al., 2021). Non-attachment in the Daoism religion is realized through the capability of giving up rigid wants and anticipations as well as having the capacity to remain in harmony with the inner self in reaction to the external forces.

New developments in the field of positive psychology also facilitate this integrative framework. According to the broaden-and-build theory, positive emotional enlarge behavioral and cognitive repertoires of a person and results in resilience and overall well-being (Fredrickson, 2021). This perception is agreeable with the Daoist principles of being open and natural in which minimal resistance to experience enables adaptive functioning. In addition to this, the research on self-compassion reveals that compassion and a positive attitude towards oneself can significantly reduce anxiety and enhance the regulation of emotions (Neff and Germer, 2022). Such findings also confirm the applicability of acceptance-based processes in mental health. Notably, the application of wuwei in contemporary treatment models fulfills the cultural dimension of the treatment of mental health in China. The traditional Chinese philosophies continue to affect the cognition regarding the health, balance and humanness. Through an alignment of therapeutic plans to these cultural values, practitioners will be in a position to enhance the participation of clients and the effectiveness of treatment outcomes. The existing empirical evidence points to the fact that culture-specific interventions are more useful in reducing the degree of psychological distress and increasing the rate of treatment adherence (Bernal and Domenech Rodriguez, 2012).

The concept of anxiety proposed as an effect of imbalance between control and acceptance is thus theorized by the proposed theoretical framework. Psychological pain will result due to overworking, fixed thinking and emotional avoidance, and well-being will result due to adaptive acceptance, flexibility and consistency with natural systems. This framework offers a holistic and cultural approach to the management of anxiety through the integration of wuwei with psychological flexibility, mindfulness, decentering, and non-attachment.

Lastly, the integrative model is the one that combines the Eastern philosophy with the Western psychological science and provides holistic view of anxiety, both in terms of cognitive processes and the existential levels. It touches upon the opportunities of the Daoist philosophy as a theoretical framework and a practical foundation of the development of culturally sensitive therapeutic intervention in China.

### III. Methodology

In this study, the design of the literature review is qualitative since it will be conducted in a systematic approach that examines how the Daoist concept of wuwei can be integrated with contemporary techniques of managing anxiety. As the subject of the study is abstract and interdisciplinary, the narrative review approach with some systematic elements was applied to summarize the results of the study conducted in the fields of philosophy, psychology, and mental health. The design allows integrating different theoretical perspectives and empirical studies particularly in areas where the conceptualization is in its infancy.

#### 3.1 Research Design

The selection of the narrative literature review as the primary methodological tool was informed by the fact that more intricate philosophical constructs and empirical evidence in the discipline of psychology are simpler to investigate using the specific method. Unlike systematic reviews, which imply a limited scope of empirical results, which are predetermined, narrative review implies a broader conceptual synthesis and theory-building (Snyder, 2019). It is particularly appropriate to the research of wuwei, a concept of philosophy that requires both the interpretive, and the empirical, confirmation.

In order to achieve the methodological rigor, certain aspects of the systematic review processes were implemented, e.g. the structured search strategies, the pre-planned inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the data extraction procedures. This hybrid approach will ensure the rigor of the meaning and the quality of findings as recommended by the existing recommendations of integrative reviews in interdisciplinary research (Booth et al., 2016).

#### 3.2 Search Strategy

An extensive literature review was done in several scholarly databases, such as Web of Science, Scopus, PubMed, and Google Scholar. The search was narrowed down to the articles published in 2020-2025 to ensure that only the topical and current articles were taken into consideration. The keywords and search terms were designed according to the main themes of the research and incorporated such combinations as: wuwei, Zhuangzi, Daoism philosophy, anxiety, mindfulness, the acceptance-based therapy, psychological flexibility, and China.

The search results were limited by using Boolean operators (AND, OR) and filters that cleared down the search results to peer-reviewed journal articles written in the English language. More searches were done by hand by



reviewing the reference list of the articles of interest to obtain more sources. This was a strategy that ensured the philosophical as well as the empirical literature was adequately covered to the research objectives.

### ***3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria***

The inclusion criteria were to be used in attaining the relevance and quality of the selected studies. The articles were included according to the following criteria: (a) published in 2020-2025; (b) peer reviewed; (c) on anxiety, mindfulness, acceptance based therapies, or Daoist philosophy; (d) that has empirical evidence or theoretical knowledge of Chinese setting. Quantitative and qualitative studies were both taken to have a broad scope of views.

The exclusion criteria included the following: (a) not the full-text articles; (b) the articles that do not refer to the mental health or psychological processes; (c) the articles that are not methodologically sound; and (d) the non-academic articles such as opinion articles or blogs. Moreover, the studies which looked at the pharmacological interventions alone and not psychological and philosophical were also dropped.

### ***3.4 Analysis and Extraction of Data***

The selected literature was analyzed sequentially and necessary data were taken out, including the name of the author, date of publication, research design, sample (where necessary), key findings, and theoretical contributions. Thematic analysis method was used so as to determine the repeating patterns and conceptual relationships in the literature.

It was discovered that the analysis comprised three areas: (1) philosophical explanations of wuwei and the related Daoist notions; (2) empirical research on the anxiety management interventions, particularly mindfulness and acceptance-based intervention; and (3) conceptual similarities between the Daoist philosophy and contemporary psychological concepts. Themes were reduced in a repetitive manner so as to establish an integrative image of how wuwei can inform current practices in therapy.

The thematic synthesis is also believed to be a handy tool that can be applied in integrating qualitative and quantitative data in literature reviews particularly in the health and social sciences (Thomas and Harden, 2008). The method allowed determining the common mechanisms, including acceptance, non-attachment, and cognitive flexibility, on which the theoretical synthesis is based.

### ***3.5 Quality Assessment***

To investigate the credibility of the review, the quality of the studies that were included was identified according to the established appraisal criteria. Methodological rigor, size of sample, measure validity and understandability of findings were used to evaluate the empirical studies. The theoretical papers were rated based on the clarity of concepts, their coherence and their relevance to the research questions.

In recent recommendations, it has been pointed out that there is a need to be transparent and reproducible in literature review particularly when the study is interdisciplinary (Page et al., 2021). On this, the paper will give proper description of search methods, selection rules and analysis to enhance reliability and reproducibility.

### ***3.6 Ethical Considerations***

As the study is based on the interpretation of the published literature, the secondary research, there is no human subject in it and, therefore, there is no necessity to have an official ethical approval. However, the ethics were met by means of fair representation of original authors' works, avoiding any plagiarism and ensuring that all necessary references were added onboard according to the APA 7<sup>th</sup> edition recommendations.

### ***3.7 Methodological Limitations***

Although the chosen methodology can be applied to achieve a holistic synthesis, it is important to mention that there are certain shortcomings. Narrative reviews can be prone to selection bias and interpretivist. Even though there were systematic factors that were established to mitigate these risks, the results are to be interpreted within the framework of the selected literature. In addition, English publications may be used and this prevents the selection of relevant sources in the Chinese language.

## **IV. Results**

These findings of this literature review are structured in terms of four broad thematic areas, which are founded on the systematic analysis (1) conceptualization of wuwei and its association with psychological functioning, (2) efficacy of contemporary anxiety management interventions in China, (3) similarity in the mechanisms of Daoist philosophy and contemporary therapeutic interventions, and (4) development of an integrative conceptual model. All these themes define the way of combination of Daoist ideas with contemporary psychological methods of treating anxiety.



#### ***4.1 Conceptualization of Wuwei and Psychological Functioning***

The analysis shows that wuwei is always developed as active and changing psychological state instead of passive inaction. In the literature reviewed, wuwei has been associated with a decreased level of cognitive interference, a reduced level of self-conscious striving, and with being more adaptive to situational demands. This is the opposite of the rigidity of control behaviour of people with anxiety and is characterized by spontaneity, effortlessness and non-coercive approach to action.

Wuwei psychologically refers to the reduction in maladaptive mental behaviors that involve overthinking, rumination and anticipatory worry. According to the literature, individuals who adopt the wuwei oriented approach to thinking have slim possibilities of being overly oriented in thinking in the future, and this is a primary feature of the anxiety disorders. Rather, they show a higher level of tolerance of uncertainty and a better balanced experience of the current situation.

Also, emotional stability and resilience are also linked to wuwei. As the need to manage internal conditions is set free, individuals do not experience escalation and repression of emotions. This is in line with modern conceptualizations of adaptive emotion regulation, in which acceptance and openness are considered more healthful options than avoidance or suppression. Overall, wuwei is a psychologically beneficial tendency, the presence of which helps to achieve intellectual freedom and emotional balance.

#### ***4.2 Modern Anxiety Management Skills Effectiveness in China.***

The review confirms that the efficacy of mindfulness-based and acceptance-based approaches is very high in terms of reducing the symptoms of anxiety among Chinese individuals. The outcome of the research will always be an increase in the emotional control, the stress and rumination will decrease, and the mental well-being of the study participants, who underwent such intervention, will be enhanced.

Structured programs like mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) are good mindfulness-based interventions with good results in clinical and non-clinical groups. The participants will be more aware of their thoughts and feelings and this makes them less reactive and more coping. The interventions are particularly feasible when the case is that of university students, as it has been established that they are the most vulnerable to anxiety due to the academic and social pressures.

Acceptance based therapies also possess significant advantages since they target at experiential avoidance, which is among the cause of anxiety disorders. These treatments reduce the severity and frequency of the symptoms of anxiety by causing people to be tolerant and not to be opposed to internal experiences. The participants report increased psychological flexibility and being able to work under the conditions of distress.

It is worth noting that the culturally adjusted versions of these interventions are more effective in the Chinese context. The more engaged and better outcomes are observed in the procedures which include culturally sensitive values, such as harmony, balance, and acceptance. This also reveals the importance of philosophy of the indigenous people, such as wuwei, to be integrated in the present therapeutic methods.

#### ***4.3 Similarity in mechanisms between Daoist Philosophy and Modern Therapies.***

Among the primary findings of this review, it is possible to state that the similarity between the Daoist construct and the contemporary psychological processes is extremely high. Wuwei and the modern strategies of anxiety management have certain central constructs that have become the point of contact.

The first identified common mechanism is known as acknowledgement. The acceptance-based therapies, as well as wuwei, emphasize the necessity to leave thoughts and feelings alone. That way, one becomes less likely to be engaged in experiential avoidance, which is directly attributed to anxiety.

Second, there is another point of convergence, which is the cognitive diffusion or decentering. The Daoist philosophy encourages individuals to observe their lives in such a manner that they are not attached to it, just the way the psychological habit of visualizing thoughts is based on the indeterminacy of mental activities, rather than realities. This would decrease the impact of the negative thinking patterns on emotional wellbeing.

Third, psychological flexibility is close to adaptability to wuwei. Both models promote flexibility to change in circumstances and not rigidity to any pre-established expectations. Such flexibility is correlated with better coping and less psychological distress.

Fourth, the principle of non-attachment is turned into a shared philosophical and psychological notion. Getting rid of the hold of rigid desires and expectations contributes to the achievement of emotional balance and reduction of vulnerability to anxiety in people. The concept is so deeply embedded into the Daoist philosophy and gradually finding its way into modern psychology as a protection against mental health.

Finally, the existing-now mindfulness is also one of the key processes, which relate mindfulness to Daoism philosophy. They are both concerned about the present and not living in the past about regrets or living in the future with worries about the future. This mindfulness to the present also borders on rumination and is linked to feelings of calmness and clarity.



#### **4.4 Development of Integrative Conceptual Model.**

Based on the discovery of synthesis, an integrative conceptual model is proposed, which has the ability to clarify the role of wuwei to enhance modern techniques of dealing with anxiety. The model places wuwei to be a philosophical model that informs and supports the most significant psychological processes, including acceptance, cognitive flexibility, and emotional regulation.

The model attributes anxiety to an excessive amount of cognition control, rigid expectations and intolerance to inner experiences. This is due to such conditions that lead to the heightened emotional response, and the long lasting mental suffering. The contemporary treatments address these issues by promoting acceptance and mindfulness, but inclusion of wuwei brings a more cultural and philosophical base to the procedures.

The model postulates three large pathways of how wuwei functions. First, it reduces cognitive over-involvement that encourages non-striving and mindless awareness. Second, it enhances emotional management with the encouragement of acceptance and reduced opposition to inner experiences. Third, it enables flexing behavior by aligning the behaviors based on the circumstances and not on established goals.

The model also focuses on the role that the cultural background plays in determining the success of the therapeutic process. Wuwei can also be implemented as an approach toward the therapeutic process to enhance the cultural competence and client interest within the Chinese environment, in which the Daoist philosophy remains a major aspect. This kind of cultural fit increases the likelihood of the behavior change to last and have increased outcomes in the field of mental health.

Process-oriented perspective also plays an important role in the integrative model in which the change of the symptom-driven approach to the process-driven one is also underscored. Instead of trying to get rid of anxiety completely, the emphasis is made on changing the way the individual relates with the anxiety. The wuwei practice would help people live harmoniously through uncertainty and emotional swings.

#### **Summary of Findings**

Overall, the findings indicate that there is a high conceptual and functional correspondence between Daoist philosophy and modern anxiety management techniques. Wuwei offers a culturally based model that supplements the constructs of modern psychology and is a comprehensive approach to mental health. A combination of these views can be used to improve theoretical knowledge and practice of anxiety interventions in China.

#### **V. Discussion**

The literature review that is up to date was to cover the integration of the Daoist principle of wuwei to modern managerial approaches of dealing with anxiety with special reference to the Chinese context. These findings indicate the existence of a huge conceptual overlap between the Daoism philosophy and the existing psychological practices and how they can be combined with therapeutic interventions to render them more culturally specific and effective. The discussion presents the findings on the existing literature and theoretical contributions and comments on the implications on mental health practice.

Among the major findings of this review is the fact that wuwei is rather similar to the contemporary acceptance-based and mindfulness-oriented methods of anxiety. In the existing psychology, the idea is emphasized that anxiety may be maintained by the maladaptive cognitive processes such as rumination, worry, and experiential avoidance that contribute to the maintenance of the symptoms and deregulation of the feeling (Qiu and Qiu, 2024). These findings are congruent with the Daoist perspectives, which complement excessive work and resistance to natural occurrences as the source of mental distress. Wuwei is another solution because it lessens cognitive rigidity and emotional reactivity because it promotes non-striving and acceptance.

The practicality of mindfulness-based interventions in anxiety reduction is determined. A meta-analysis study conducted recently has revealed that mindfulness has a significant effect in alleviating the symptoms of anxiety due to the enhancement of intentional control and rumination reduction (Fumero et al., 2018). Similarly, the studies conducted in relation to the Chinese population prove the fact that mindfulness training improves emotional regulation and psychological wellbeing. Meta-analytic research of samples of university students in China shows that mindfulness-based interventions can be effectively used to enhance the results of psychological health, such as emotional regulation and reduced anxiety and stress symptoms rates (Zuo et al., 2023). Such results reinforce the position that mindfulness and wuwei have some common mechanisms, especially the focus on living in the present moment and non-judgmental acceptance.

Moreover, some acceptance-based therapies, such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) have become focused on the role played by experiential avoidance in the emergence of anxiety disorders. Empirical studies have shown that experiential avoidance and acceptance processes should be decreased and increased respectively to achieve significant changes in mental health outcomes (Lewin, 2022). Wuwei, the Daoist idea that encourages individuals to surrender experiences to their natural way rather than attempting to control them,



is supportive of this style. It means that wuwei may be applied to the philosophical foundation of acceptance-based interventions.

The other notable observation is that psychological flexibility is a shared mechanism between the Daoism philosophy and the current therapy. It has also been discovered that psychological flexibility is among the main predictors of resilience, emotional well-being and adaptive functioning in diverse population (Kashdan and Rottenberg, 2010). The fewer rigid people are, the more they are able to adjust the evolving situations and deal with stress. This is an indication of the Daoism philosophy of flexibility that sees individuals dynamically respond to changes in life without being attached to the outcomes. Integrating wuwei into the therapeutic models has the potential of enhancing the acquisition of psychological flexibility amongst the clients.

This concept of non-attachment also contributes to the fact that the correlation between the Daoist philosophy and modern psychology is even stronger. It is demonstrated that the higher the levels of non-attachment, the lower is anxiety, the lower are levels of psychological distress, and the higher is life satisfaction (Whitehead et al., 2021). The non-attachment of Daoism is the secret of harmony and balance as it does not enable individuals to be so engaged in specific outcomes. This school of thought is a complement to the existing therapeutic practices that encourage people to leave the current thought patterns and emotional reactions which are not very helpful.

Besides mechanisms on an individual level, the cultural context is also important in influencing the effectiveness of mental health interventions. Empirical evidence also supports it by showing that culturally adapted therapies are more effective than the standard ones particularly when it comes to non-Western populations (Hwang, 2009). Application of wuwei to therapeutic practices would assist to make them more acceptable and relatable in China whereby the Daoist philosophy continues to influence the cultural values. This cultural congruence may improve the attendance and adherence of treatment leading to better outcomes.

This integrative model is supported by new researches on culturally informed psychotherapy. As a result, studies have revealed that culturally adapted psychological therapy that includes the application of Chinese traditional values and the use of culturally competent approaches can improve emotional regulation and reduce psychological distress among Chinese clients (Ren et al., 2025). On the same note, interventions including culturally based considerations, including priorities on social harmony, interpersonal equilibrium, and contextual significance, have been demonstrated to positively affect mental health outcomes in Chinese clients by enhancing emotional control and reducing symptoms (Li et al., 2023). These findings suggest that the culture of therapeutic practices should be grounded on frameworks that have cultural significance.

The results of this review are also in line with the current developments in the area of global mental health that focus on the need to integrate the indigenous knowledge systems with evidence-based practices. Some scholars think that the combination of the traditional and community-based knowledge system and clinical and scientific models can lead to the creation of more holistic, inclusive, and culturally responsive care models (Jilka et al., 2025). The Daoist philosophy, in its turn, may be applied successfully to the creation of the culturally competent interventions that may be used to address the cognitive and existential components of anxiety and overcome them.

Additionally, the concept of wuwei in modern therapy can be used to shift the trend in which the treatment is based on the symptoms rather than the health of the process. Traditional approaches are oriented towards reducing the symptoms, and the Daoism philosophy is oriented on balance, harmony, and alignment of the natural processes. It is in line with the recent changes in positive psychology, which are aimed at positively improving well-being but not only reducing distress (Wong et al., 2022).

Self-compassion as a factor in management of anxiety also comes out as an important element. Research indicates that self-compassion can reduce anxiety by improving the acceptance of internal experience and reducing self-criticism and results in improved emotional regulation and mental health outcomes (Han and Kim, 2023). This is in line with the Daoist focus on gentleness and non-coercion, which implies that wuwei can result in a compassionate attitude towards self-regulation. Integrating self-compassion and wuwei practices can also be used to enhance the therapeutic outcomes. Wuwei together with a mindfulness-based approach has reinforcement in neuroscientific research. The research confirms that mindfulness-based interventions do change neural systems engaged in affective control and attention to the environment, including the prefrontal cortex and amygdala, and this is why anxiety and stress levels reduce (Tang et al., 2015). The findings suggest that neurobiological implications of the principles of wuwei may exist and can be supported by the fact that they may be applied to contemporary treatment.

It is worth noting that the findings also suggest that there is a necessity to carry out more empirical studies to establish the use of wuwei as an element of therapeutic interventions. Though there are clear conceptual overlaps, there exists very little empirical research that directly investigates how Daoist principles can be applied in the clinical environment. Future research needs to concentrate on creating and testing interventions that directly involve the use of wuwei and comparing them to assess their efficacy in eliminating anxiety.

In a conclusive manner, the discussion has brought out the prospects of integrating Daoism philosophy and up-to-date psychological practice in enhancing anxiety management in China. The correspondence between



wuwei and critical mechanisms of therapies, including acceptance, mindfulness, and psychological flexibility, gives a solid basis on the establishment of culturally sensitive interventions. This synthesis of the Eastern with the West perspective offers a complete perspective on the problem of anxiety and the way to handle it in a fast-paced society.

## VI. Conclusion

This literature review has discussed the application of the Daoist concept of wuwei to supplement contemporary methods of anxiety management, particularly in China. The findings suggest that the conceptual relationship between wuwei and modern psychology is fairly developed, especially the mindfulness-based and acceptance-based therapies. Both schools of thoughts emphasize on non-striving, acceptance of inner life and adaptive response to the present moment, which are central to the reduction of anxiety and enhancing of psychological well-being. As indicated in the review, anxiety is normally perpetuated by excessive cognitive control, high expectations, and avoiding emotional experiences. Instead, Wuwei offers a philosophical theory that encourages effortless action, flexibility, and harmony with forces of nature. Wuwei provides a culturally-grounded approach of curing the processes of anxiety by fostering non-attachment and reducing the feeling of control. Besides, Daoist approach and the contemporary therapeutic model are able to enhance cultural suitability of mental health interventions in China. Given the significant role of traditional philosophies in the Chinese values and worldviews, wuwei application in psychological practice can improve the measures of engagement, acceptability and effectiveness. The practice is also an aspect of the wider trend of culturally sensitive mental health care. The given conceptual model is the synthesis of the Eastern and Western approaches that gives the comprehensive picture of the anxiety that considers both the cognitive and existential perspectives. It does not merely tend to decrease the symptoms but rather it tends to alter the manner in which individuals interact with their thoughts and emotions. In conclusion, the integration of wuwei and the modern strategies of dealing with anxiety could be regarded as an encouraging research and practice direction. Future studies on this field must attempt to empirically test this integration and develop systematic interventions in order to effect operationalization of Daoist principles in the clinical practice.

## VII. Theoretical Implications

The article assists in shaping the theoretical foundation of cross-cultural psychology through the integration of the Daoism philosophy with the contemporary model of psychology. It is based on existing theories of anxiety by proposing wuwei as a culturally grounded concept and is consistent with key processes, such as psychological flexibility, acceptance and non-attachment. The results support the notion of mental health as a process based conceptualization due to the fact that dynamic interaction of cognition, emotion and environment is more significant than symptom based conceptualizations. The studies also add to the conceptual foundation of mindfulness and acceptance-based therapies by putting them in a more general philosophical context. This incorporation challenges this Western-centricity of the theories and highlights the significance of indigenous knowledge systems to the psychology science, which has prompted the development of more evocative and culturally responsive theoretical frameworks.

## VIII. Practical Implications

The implications of the current study to mental health practice, particularly in China are very useful. The cultural relevance may also be enhanced by integrating wuwei in the therapeutic interventions, and the client engagement may be enhanced by aligning the treatment methodology to the values familiar to them. Non-striving, acceptance, and naturalness are the concepts that can be incorporated into existing models such as mindfulness-based and acceptance-based treatments by mental health practitioners to create interventions that can be more culturally appropriate.

Clinical practitioners can use wuwei-based interventions to help their clients reduce unnecessary amounts of cognitive control, anxiety management, and the establishment of adaptive coping strategies. As an example, the clients could be promoted to non-judgmental and non-resistant attitude to their thoughts and feelings, which would result in the reduction of the experiential avoidance and the creation of emotional balance. Besides that, Daoist concepts can be added to psycho educational programs to create awareness regarding culturally-based well-being practices.

Wuwei practices can be applied in the education field in teaching student wellness programs to eliminate the high anxiety among Chinese students in universities. These insights can also be useful to policymakers and mental health organizations since they can design culturally-based mental health programs.

Overall, the Daoist philosophy can be the possible solution to enhance the effectiveness and availability of anxiety interventions in culturally diverse groups by integrating it into modern psychological practice.



## IX. Limitations

There are a number of limitations that this study has. To begin with, since it is a literature review, the findings are conditional on the scope and quality of available studies that may restrict the extrapolation of results. Second, the application of English-language publications might have left out the useful literature in Chinese language, which might restrict the richness of the culture. Third, the theory that advocates the combination of wuwei with the contemporary psychological interventions is conceptual in nature, and hence can only be scientifically tested to a small extent. Despite the existing strong theoretical connections, there is a lack of direct experimental research on the interventions of wuwei. Moreover, interpretive bias may be instigated by the narrative elements of the review, despite the efforts to be systematic. Finally, the lack of consistency might have been influenced by the differences in the quality of the methodology of the studies included. Future research can reduce the limitations by the use of empirical designs, multilingual sources and cross cultural samples.

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