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Mapping the Evolution of Buddhist Tourism Research: Trends, Key Themes and Future Directions

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Abstract

Buddhist tourism represents a dynamic and multifaceted domain within the broader field of religious and cultural tourism, gaining prominence for its socio-cultural and economic implications. Despite its growing importance, a comprehensive understanding of its scholarly landscape remains limited, necessitating an in-depth exploration of existing research. This study aims to conduct a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of literature pertaining to Buddhist tourism, with the primary objectives of understanding the evolving scholarly landscape, identifying key trends, seminal works, influential authors, and emerging research areas. A systematic bibliometric analysis was conducted using English-language articles indexed in Scopus, with a curated dataset of 236 articles analysed to uncover publication patterns, thematic clusters, and scholarly collaborations. Qualitative insights were integrated to complement the quantitative findings, offering a holistic perspective. The analysis reveals significant insights into the structure and evolution of Buddhist tourism research, including a steady growth in publications with a notable surge in recent years, identification of prominent themes such as sustainable tourism, cultural heritage, and ethical practices, recognition of influential journals like the International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage and prolific authors such as Keji Huang and Chris Ryan, and emerging research areas focused on sustainability, cultural authenticity, and the interplay between religion and tourism. This study contributes to advancing the understanding of Buddhist tourism by mapping its scholarly trajectory and highlighting areas for future research. Policymakers and tourism stakeholders can leverage these insights to foster sustainable and culturally sensitive tourism practices. This research offers a rigorous, systematic analysis of Buddhist tourism literature, providing fresh insights that enrich scholarly discourse and inspire further exploration in this dynamic field.

Keywords

Buddhist tourism • Bibliometric analysis • Citation • Co-citation analysis • VOSviewer



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Mapping the Evolution of Buddhist Tourism Research: Trends, Key Themes and Future Directions

Buddhist Tourism, an intersection of spirituality and travel, has garnered increasing attention from scholars and practitioners alike recently. This burgeoning field explores the dynamic relationship between Buddhist heritage sites, pilgrimage routes and the tourism industry, shedding light on the multifaceted interactions between religion, culture and, commerce. As the demand for religious tourism, including Buddhist tourism, continues to escalate, projections indicate a substantial growth in the Global Religious Tourism market between 2024 and 2031 (Religious Tourism Market Share Research Report, 2024). The World Bank highlights the necessity of comprehending the tourism experience for both devout Buddhists and non-Buddhists, emphasising the importance of considering Buddhist source markets when analysing tourism demand. Moreover, the overall religious tourism market is expected to reach a value of over 15 billion U.S. dollars by 2033 (Statista, 2023).

Despite growing interest in Religious Tourism, a comprehensive understanding of the evolving scholarly landscape within Buddhist Tourism remains elusive. As interest in Buddhist Tourism continues to grow, there arises a pressing need to comprehensively understand the evolving landscape of scholarly research within this domain (Srivastava, 2023). Bibliometric analysis has emerged as a powerful tool for evaluating and appraising literature across diverse disciplines. It helps in understanding how the structure of a particular field has changed over time by analysing the relationships and interactions within it, including their intellectual, social, and conceptual aspects (Donthu et al., 2021). By systematically examining publication patterns, citation networks, and the dissemination of knowledge within the academic community, bibliometric analysis provides valuable insights into the structure and evolution of a particular field. A narrative review involves the authors sifting through all available data records and making judgments based solely on their own perceptions. This manual approach may introduce subjectivity and is likely susceptible to bias. Conversely, employing a bibliometric literature review method enables the use of numerous datasets gathered from the research field (Hodgkinson & Ford, 2014; Kraus et al., 2020; Weingart, 2005). Using analysis techniques from bibliometrics enables practitioners to process data entirely using computers, resulting in a faster, more convenient, and more efficient process (Zhang et al., 2021). Bibliometric analysis involves the quantitative examination of publications within a specific academic field or journal. It utilises numerical analyses and statistical methods to extract various bibliometric indicators such as the number of articles published per year, prevalent research topics, universities contributing the most publications, leading journals in the field, prolific authors, citation counts, and prominent keywords. This process aids in understanding the landscape of scholarly output, identifying trends, and assessing the impact of research within a particular domain (Ellegaard & Wallin, 2015). In the context of Buddhist Tourism, this methodological approach offers a unique opportunity to uncover key trends, identify seminal works, and delineate the contours of scholarly discourse.

The primary objective of this study is to conduct a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of the literature related to Buddhist Tourism. Through a systematic approach, the aim is to address fundamental questions regarding the trajectory of research in this field and its implications for future study. Specifically, it seeks to clarify the evolving dynamics of Buddhist Tourism by tracing the trajectory of scholarly publications and examining shifts in thematic focus. In addition, this analysis aims to discern overarching patterns, areas of growth and developments within the field, seeking to uncover primary themes and insights emerging



from scholarly discourse. Furthermore, our analysis extends to the examination of prominent journals in the field, with the goal of identifying key outlets for disseminating research and assessing their impact within the academic community. Through this methodological lens, valuable insights have been uncovered that contribute to advancing the understanding of Buddhist Tourism and inform future research directions. The author has used bibliometric analysis to rigorously tackle the stated research questions.

1. How has research on Buddhist Tourism evolved over time?
2. What are the primary emerging themes and insights in Buddhist Tourism research, and which of these are crucial for future investigation?
3. What are the key journals frequently cited in the field of Buddhist Tourism research, and what valuable insights do articles published in these journals offer to guide future research directions?

To address these research questions, a rigorous methodological approach was employed, combining bibliometric analysis with qualitative insights derived from scholarly literature. The research endeavours to provide valuable insights into the landscape of scholarly research within Buddhist tourism, but it is not without its limitations. The analysis is confined to English-language articles indexed in Scopus, thereby excluding non-English publications and potentially limiting the scope of the research findings. Furthermore, the accuracy and availability of data within the Scopus database may influence the results of the analysis, and the findings may be subject to the inherent biases of bibliometric methodologies. Despite the growing interest in religious tourism, a comprehensive understanding of the evolving scholarly landscape within Buddhist tourism remains limited. Existing studies have primarily focused on broader aspects of religious tourism, with comparatively fewer efforts dedicated to systematically mapping Buddhist tourism research. As interest in Buddhist tourism continues to expand, it is necessary to critically assess and synthesise the development of scholarship within this field to identify emerging trends, thematic concentrations, and potential research gaps.

Literature Review

Buddhist Tourism

The study of Buddhist tourism navigates a complex landscape, drawing on various theoretical frameworks and empirical investigations to unravel the intricate dynamics of this niche within the tourism sector. Scholars have harnessed globalisation theories to illuminate how global trends intersect with local traditions, particularly evident in the reinvention of cultural elements at Buddhist tourism sites in the middle of modern influences (Mak et al., 2012). Complementing this perspective, social identity theory offers valuable insights into how residents' attachment to place-based social identity shapes their attitudes towards tourism, underscoring the significance of local community engagement in Buddhist tourism destinations (Wang et al., 2014). Moreover, collaborative approaches and business alliances have emerged as essential strategies for fostering sustainable tourism practices, highlighting the importance of stakeholder partnerships in preserving heritage sites and promoting responsible tourism (Sotiriadis & Loedolff, 2015). Concurrently, the concept of co-production underscores the collaborative efforts between visitors and local communities to co-create meaningful experiences at sacred Buddhist sites, emphasising the importance of community involvement in tourism service delivery (Palumbo Rocco & Trocciola Gaetano, 2016).

As the motivations and experiences of Buddhist tourists come into focus, a rich tapestry of insights emerges from the recent literature. Scholars have delved into the complexities of competing legitimacy



at Buddhist festivals, drawing from symbolic interaction and Buddhist thought to illuminate the nuanced dynamics shaping tourist experiences (Ryan & Gu, 2010). Moreover, explorations of tourist perceptions of the significance of Buddhist temple food in Western tourists' experiences offer fresh perspectives, expanding the discourse on culinary tourism within Buddhist contexts (Son & Xu, 2013). Studies exploring mindful tourist experiences from a Buddhist perspective and the transformative role of temple management in healing visitors' minds contribute to a deeper understanding of the diverse motivations and experiences of Buddhist tourists (Chen et al., 2017; Levi & Kocher, 2013; Wang et al., 2016).

The impact of tourism on Buddhist heritage sites and local communities has emerged as a central theme in the literature, highlighting the complex dynamics inherent in tourism development. Scholars advocate for community-based heritage tourism initiatives as a means of fostering inclusive development and safeguarding cultural heritage, while also identifying potential conflicts between community development and heritage conservation (Chakravarty & Irazábal, 2011; Vafadari, 2008). Additionally, studies underscore the importance of understanding residents' perceptions in tourism planning and development, emphasising the pivotal role of community involvement and perceived benefits. Explorations of resident's perceptions of responsibilities for heritage conservation have shed light on the intricate interplay of environmental awareness, heritage value recognition, and place attachment (Adongo et al., 2017; Ekern et al., 2012; Silva & Chapagain, 2013).

Within the broader context of tourism, religion, and culture, scholars offer nuanced insights into the intricate relationship between these dimensions. By examining the challenges faced by women seeking enlightenment within Buddhist disciplines and emphasising the significance of cultural and religious factors in shaping tourism employment dynamics, scholars underscore the importance of holistic approaches to capacity building and community empowerment (Liu & Liu, 2008; Reeves & Long, 2011; Smith, 2015). Furthermore, discussions on the spiritual dimensions of tourism experiences and frameworks for understanding temple stay experiences within the broader context of culture, religion, and tourism highlight the transformative potential of religious tourism experiences (Collins-Kreiner & Wall, 2015; Lundberg & Ziakas, 2018; Singgalen et al., 2019). Collectively, these studies underscore the multifaceted nature of Buddhist tourism and the need for holistic and culturally sensitive approaches to tourism planning and management. In an overview, contemporary research on Buddhist tourism sheds light on the complexities of this specialised sector within the broader tourism industry. Scholars utilise diverse theoretical frameworks to explore topics such as tourist motivations, community engagement, and heritage conservation. This body of literature underscores the necessity of comprehensive and culturally attuned strategies for understanding and managing Buddhist tourism destinations in today's dynamic global context.

Bibliometric Analysis

Bibliometric analysis has become increasingly vital in research evaluation across scientific and applied fields. Drawing from databases such as Thomson Reuters' Web of Science (WoS) and Elsevier's Scopus, bibliometric indicators offer insights into national research performance and the impact of scholarly production (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2015). However, the use of publication and citation data for evaluation presents technical and methodological challenges, requiring specific conditions for effective application (Weingart, 2005). In bibliometric analysis, crucial aspects such as database coverage, data consistency, and metric use are essential (Thompson & Walker, 2015). The establishment of bibliometric methods as scientific specialties reflects their growing importance in research evaluation, especially concerning multidisciplinary articles (Ellegaard & Wallin, 2015). The application of bibliometric analysis extends across diverse fields,



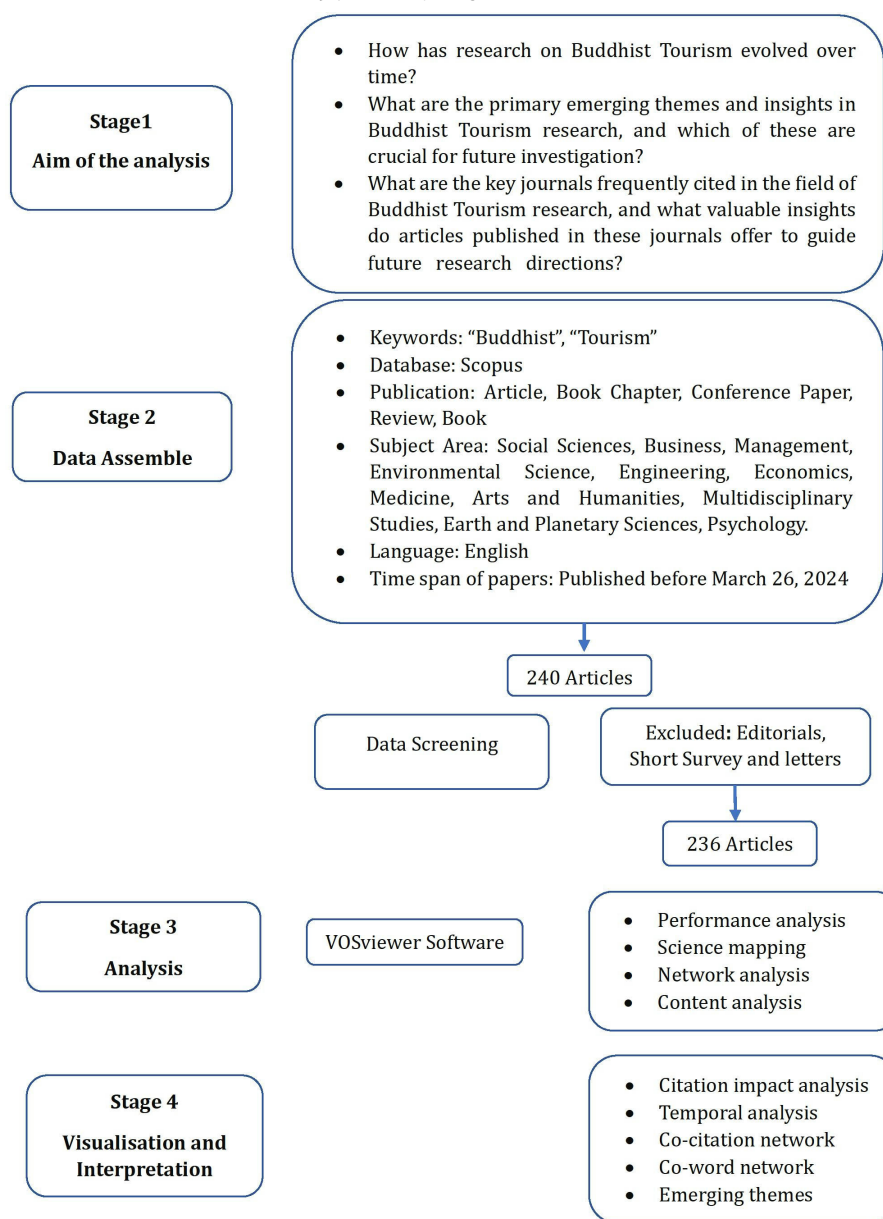
including tourism. Koseoglu et al. (2016) evaluated the use of bibliometric studies in tourism, observing a rise in systematic review studies but limited application of evaluative and relational bibliometric approaches. Meanwhile, Moral-Muñoz et al. (2020) provided a comprehensive overview of the software tools available for bibliometric, emphasising the importance of data acquisition sources and visualisation tools in performance analysis. These findings underscore the value of bibliometric analysis in evaluating research performance, identifying trends, and informing future research directions (Donthu et al., 2021). The indispensable role of software tools for conducting bibliometric analysis has become apparent, with a range of tools facilitating data acquisition, performance assessment, and visualisation.

VOSviewer

VOSviewer, a software developed by Nees Jan van Eck and Ludo Waltman (2009), is designed for constructing and visualising bibliometric maps, offering a user-friendly approach for interpreting extensive bibliometric data. Leydesdorff and Rafols (2011) discuss various methods for creating global journal maps from Web-of-Science data, with a particular focus on VOSviewer compared to tools like Gephi, emphasising the significance of multidimensional scaling algorithms for illustrating citations. Expanding on VOSviewer's capabilities, Eck and Waltman (2011) explored its text mining functionality, showcasing its utility in analysing large text datasets. Apriliyanti and Alon (2017) use VOSviewer for co-citation analysis in a review of absorptive capacity articles, identifying distinct research streams and underscoring the software's efficacy in bibliometric analysis. In a comparative study by Pan et al. (2018) examining bibliometric mapping software tools, including VOSviewer, a rising trend in usage was observed, with VOSviewer being the most commonly used tool. Yu et al. (2020) employed VOSviewer for a bibliometric analysis of COVID-19 publications, underscoring its role in identifying key topics and future research directions in the middle of the pandemic.

Methodology

This research adopts a meticulous approach, using a combination of bibliometric analysis and qualitative insights from scholarly literature, to explore the realm of Buddhist Tourism. The study used journals indexed in Scopus due to their comprehensive coverage. Bibliometric analysis has emerged as a preferred approach for assessing and appraising literature across diverse disciplines. Academics frequently employ databases like Scopus and Web of Science (WOS) for conducting bibliometric investigations (Echchakoui, 2020). Scopus is renowned for its wider coverage in comparison to Web of Science (Bar-Ilan, 2010).

Figure 1***Bibliometric Method Roadmap for analysing Buddhist Tourism***

Source: Author

Scopus has also been employed to map global scientific publications, visually illustrating bibliometric networks through tools such as VOSviewer (Purnomo et al., 2020). The research focused predominantly on the intersection of Buddhism and Tourism. Keywords such as "Buddhist" and "Tourism" were employed. Editorials, short surveys and letters were excluded from the dataset, and the analysis was limited to English-language articles.

Following this filtering process, 236 articles were identified for further examination. The timeframe for inclusion spans publications up to March 26, 2024, ensuring relevance and currency in findings. In order to visualise and analyse the interconnectedness of scholarly works, VOSviewer software is employed. This facilitates a comprehensive examination of the themes, trends, and relationships within the field. While

the methodology employed is robust, it is crucial to acknowledge the potential limitations inherent in bibliometric analysis, such as language constraints, biases within databases, and the exclusion of certain publication types.

Table 1

Research Overview

Question	Parameter	Methodology
1. How has research on Buddhist Tourism evolved over time?	Most cited authors	Performance Analysis
	Temporal distribution	Temporal analysis
	Most contributing source	Performance Analysis
	Keyword trends	Performance Analysis
	Collaboration networks	Science Mapping and Network Analysis
2. What are the primary emerging themes and insights in Buddhist Tourism research, and which of these are crucial for future investigation?	Cluster analysis	Science Mapping
	Keyword co-occurrence	Science Mapping and Network Analysis
	Emerging themes	Science Mapping
3. What are the key journals frequently cited in the field of Buddhist Tourism research, and what valuable insights do articles published in these journals offer to guide future research directions?	Most cited journals	Performance Analysis
	Citation network analysis	Science Mapping and Network Analysis
	Journal impact	Performance Analysis
	Research directions	Performance Analysis and Content Analysis

Source: Bibliometric Analysis by the Author

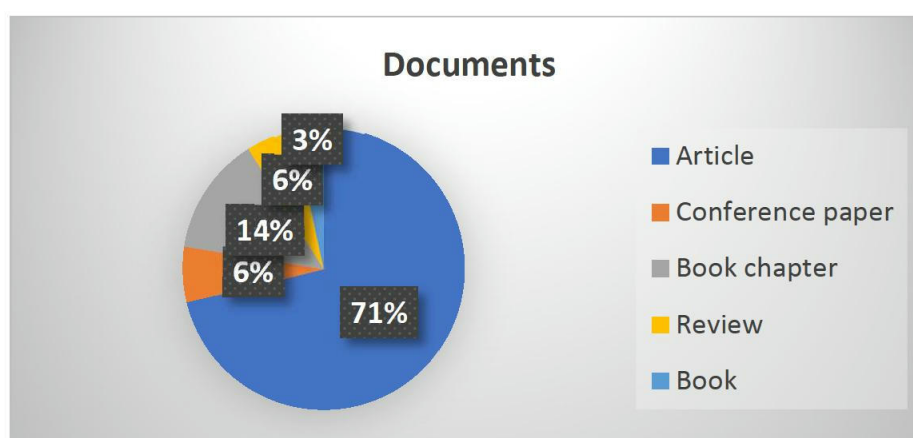
Analysis

Document Type Distribution

Among the 236 documents identified following data screening, the distribution of document types was as follows: 168 articles, 32 book chapters, 15 conference papers, 13 reviews, and 8 books. This breakdown provides a clear understanding of the composition of the dataset, with articles being the most prevalent document type followed by book chapters, conference papers, reviews, and books.

Figure 2

Distribution of Document Types



Source: Bibliometric Analysis by the Author

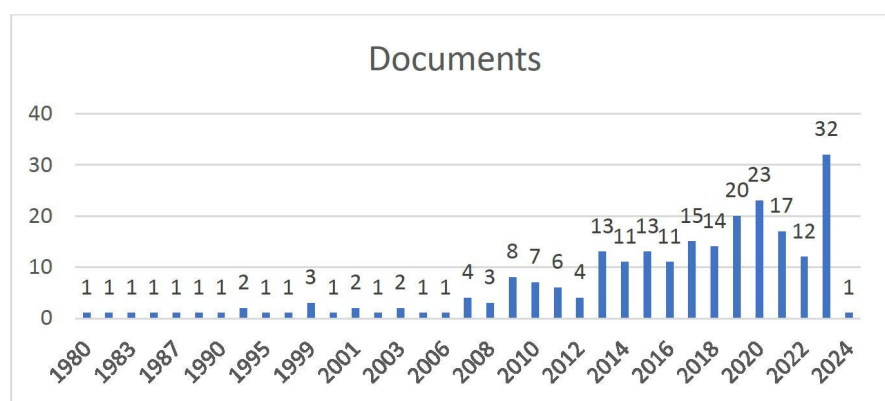


1. Article: 168
2. Book chapter: 32
3. Conference paper: 15
4. Review: 13
5. Book: 8

Publications per Year

The analysis of yearly publications on Buddhist tourism reveals a dynamic trajectory indicative of evolving scholarly interest and engagement. The inception of research on Buddhist tourism can be traced back to the seminal work of John Hurrell Crook (Crook, 1980). The initial period from 1980 to the 1990s depicts a landscape characterised by sporadic publication, with only one article published in select years.

Figure 3
Number of Publications per Year



Source: Bibliometric Analysis by the Author

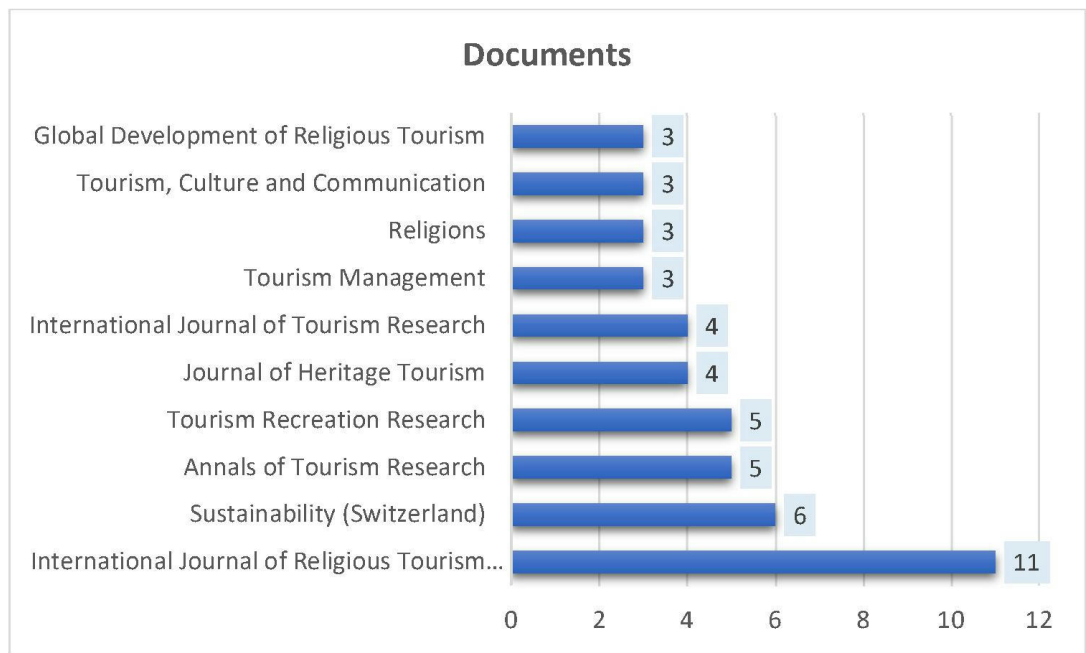
This paucity of scholarly output highlights a nascent stage in the exploration of Buddhist tourism within academic circles, perhaps reflecting the limited awareness or prioritisation of the topic. However, the emergence of a more robust pattern became apparent in the 2000s, with a notable inflection point as the number of articles increased. This period likely reflects a growing recognition among scholars of the multifaceted dimensions of Buddhist Tourism. The peak of this growth is observed in 2023, with a record-high of 32 articles published on the topic. This milestone underscores the culmination of decades of scholarly efforts and highlights the heightened prominence of Buddhist tourism as a focal area of academic research.

Documents as per Source

The International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage leads in publishing research on Buddhist tourism. This esteemed journal has made significant scholarly contributions, with 11 articles dedicated to the exploration of this niche area. Despite its relatively lower Cite Score of 5.8 in March 2024, Sustainability maintains its influence in this niche domain. Following closely behind are the Annals of Tourism Research and Tourism Recreation Research; each having published 5 articles on the topic. Annals of Tourism Research with a CiteScore of 15.9, while Tourism Recreation Research has a CiteScore of 8.9.



Figure 4
Document per Source



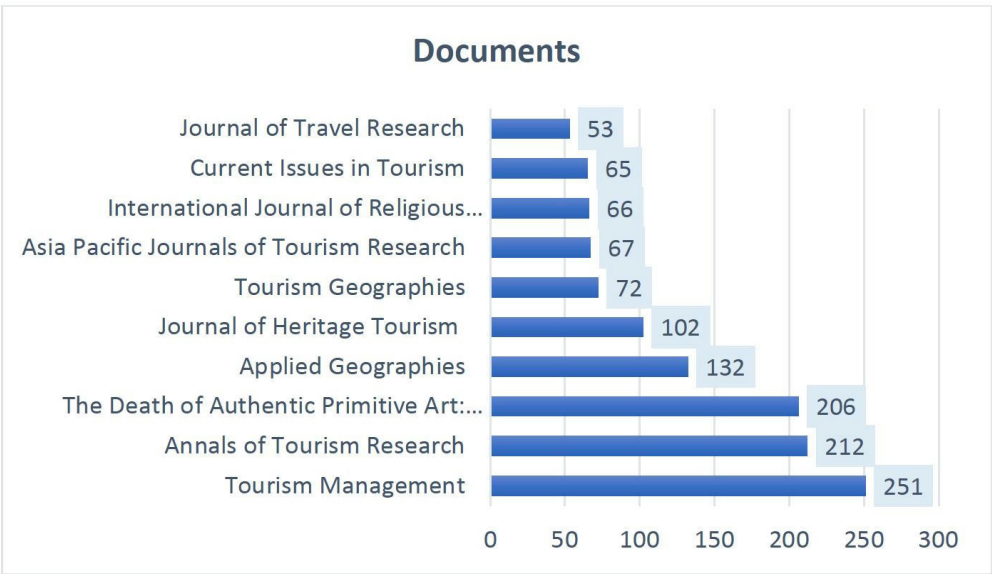
Source: *Bibliometric Analysis by the Author*

Most Cited Sources

The examination of key sources on the topic of Buddhist tourism offers valuable insights into the publications that have made substantial contributions to academic discussions and research efforts in this field. At the forefront of this analysis is *Tourism Management*, recognised for its robust peer-review process and remarkable CiteScore of 22.9, indicating its widespread influence and credibility. Notably, the esteemed *Annals of Tourism Research* closely follows, distinguished for its interdisciplinary approach and theoretical advancements, boasting a notable CiteScore of 15.9. In addition, noteworthy contributions come from sources such as "The Death of Authentic Primitive Art: And Other Tales of Progress," a book that provides unique perspectives on the subject matter. Furthermore, both *Applied Geographies* and the *Journal of Heritage Tourism* emerged as significant sources with substantial citations related to Buddhist tourism. This analysis showcases the diverse sources shaping our knowledge of Buddhist tourism and related themes



Figure 5
Most Cited Sources Top of FormTop of Form



Source: Bibliometric Analysis by the Author

Top Contributing Authors

These authors have significantly contributed to the research landscape, showcasing their expertise and knowledge in the field. Identifying these prolific authors offers valuable insights into the key contributors shaping discussions and advancements in the field.

Table 2
Top Contributing Authors

Sr. No.	Author	Documents
1.	Keji Huang	6
2.	Chris Ryan	5
3.	Cora Un In Wong	5
4.	Alison McIntosh	3
5.	Byunggil Chun	3
6.	Jaeyeon Choe	3
7.	David Geary	3
8.	Choong-Ki Lee	3
9.	Philip Pearce	3
10.	Timothy J. Lee	3

Source: Bibliometric Analysis by the Author

Most Cited Authors

The table highlights the most cited authors in the realm of Buddhist tourism research. Shelly Errington leads with one document cited a remarkable 206 times, followed closely by Chris Ryan with five documents garnering 197 citations. Gypan P. Nyaupane and Keji Huang also emerged prominently, each with multiple contributions and substantial citation counts. Notably, Cora un in Wong and Alison McIntosh’s collaborative



works have received significant attention, underlining their collective impact on the field. This diverse mix of authors underscores the multidimensional exploration of Buddhist tourism and its associated themes, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of scholarly inquiry in this area.

Table 3

Most Cited Author Top of Form

Sr. No.	Author	Docs	Article	Citation
1.	Shelly Errington	1	(Errington, 1998)	206
2.	Chris Ryan	5	(Ryan et al., 2010; Wong et al., 2016; Wong et al., 2013; Ryan et al., 2013; Wong et al., 2013)	197
3.	Gypan P. Nyaupane	2	(Nyaupane, 2009; Nyaupane et al., 2015)	192
4.	Keji Huang	6	(Huang et al., 2017, 2019, 2020; Huang & Pearce, 2019; Wang et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2023)	164
5.	Surya Poudel	1	(Nyaupane et al., 2015)	150
6.	Dallen J. Timothy	1	(Nyaupane et al., 2015)	150
7.	N. Collins Kreiner	1	(Collins-Kreiner, 2010)	132
8.	Cora un in Wong	6	(Wong, 2017, 2019; Wong et al., 2016; McIntosh, et al., 2013; Ryan, et al., 2013; Wong & Ryan, 2013)	131
9.	Alison McIntosh	3	(Wong et al., 2016; McIntosh, et al., 2013; Ryan, et al., 2013)	120
10.	Ashild Kolas	2	(Kolås, 2004; Kolas, 2007)	115

Source: Bibliometric Analysis by the Author

Documents by Country

The [Table 4](#) presents an overview of documents authored by various countries in the domain of Buddhist tourism research, coupled with their respective citation counts. Notably, the United States and China emerged as the primary contributors, each producing 38 documents. However, the United States takes the lead in citations with a substantial count of 937, indicating the significant impact of its research output. Following closely, China's documents, while equally numerous, have garnered 430 citations. Thailand ranks third in document production with 28 contributions but lags behind in citations with 106. Australia, despite producing fewer documents (16), boasts a notable citation count of 308, highlighting the quality and impact of its research. The distribution underscores the global interest and engagement in studying Buddhist tourism, with contributions coming from diverse geographical regions such as India, the United Kingdom, Japan, South Korea, Macao, and Canada, each adding unique perspectives to the evolving discourse.

Table 4

Documents by Country

Sr. No.	Country	Documents	Citation
1.	United States	38	937
2.	China	38	430
3.	Thailand	28	106
4.	India	17	73
5.	Australia	16	308
6.	United Kingdom	15	113
7.	Japan	13	70



Sr. No.	Country	Documents	Citation
8.	South Korea	10	82
9.	Macao	7	141
10.	Canada	7	97

Source: Bibliometric Analysis by the Author

Most Cited Documents from a Country

The table delineates the most cited documents originating from different countries within the realm of Buddhist tourism research, accompanied by the respective number of documents produced by each nation.

Table 5

Top Cited Documents by Country

Sr. No.	Country	Citation	Documents
1.	United States	937	38
2.	China	430	38
3.	Australia	308	16
4.	New Zealand	196	5
5.	Israel	172	6
6.	Macao	141	7
7.	Norway	117	3
8.	United Kingdom	113	15
9.	Thailand	106	28
10.	Canada	97	7

Source: Bibliometric Analysis by the Author

Notably, the United States emerged as a leading contributor with an impressive citation count of 937, derived from 28 documents. China closely followed, boasting 430 citations from a larger corpus of 38 documents. Australia, while producing fewer documents (16), garners significant attention with 308 citations, underlining the impact of its research output. New Zealand and Israel showcase notable contributions as well, with fewer documents but substantial citation counts of 196 and 172, respectively. Macao, Norway, the United Kingdom, Thailand, and Canada also feature in the list, each contributing valuable insights to the global discourse on Buddhist tourism. This distribution underscores the international interest and engagement in studying this multifaceted field, with diverse countries making substantial scholarly contributions.

Most Cited Documents

The analysis began by identifying the top 10 most cited documents, aiming to uncover the prevailing themes. By examining these influential works, we discerned the recurring topics, concepts, and trends that shape the field. This approach provided valuable insights into the prevailing discourse and guided our subsequent analyses, offering a concise overview of the field's landscape.

Table 6

Most Cited Document

Author	Title	Citation
(Errington, 1998)	The Death of Authentic Primitive Art	206



Author	Title	Citation
(Nyaupane et al., 2015)	Understanding tourists in religious destinations: A social distance perspective	150
(Collins-Kreiner, 2010)	The geography of pilgrimage and tourism: Transformations and implications for applied geography	132
(Ryan & Gu, 2010)	Constructionism and culture in research: Understandings of the fourth Buddhist Festival, Wutaishan, China	76
(Philp & Mercer, 1999)	Commodification of Buddhism in contemporary burma	68
(Kolås, 2004)	Tourism and the Making of Places in Shangri-La	66
(L. I. L. Chen et al., 2017)	Mindful tourist experiences: A Buddhist perspective	63
(Wang et al., 2016)	Religious Tourist Motivation in Buddhist Mountain: A Case from China	62
(Wong & Ryan, 2013)	Tourism at Buddhist Shrines in Putuoshan: A Co-existence of the Secular and Profane	54
(Kolas, 2007)	Tourism and Tibetan Culture in Transition	49

Source: Bibliometric Analysis by the Author

Theme 1. Cultural Exploitation and Profit: Across the texts, a recurring theme is the exploitation of cultural and religious practices for economic gain. This encompasses instances where cultural heritage is transformed into commodities for the tourism industry, such as the commercialisation of sacred sites or traditions to attract tourists and generate revenue.

Theme 2. Representation and Identity Dynamics: Another prevalent theme is the examination of how cultural identities are portrayed and negotiated within the tourism context. This includes discussions on the representation of indigenous communities, the construction of national identities through cultural heritage, and the complexities of ethnic identity in regions undergoing tourism development.

Theme 3. Conflict and Contestation in Tourism Spaces: Many texts highlight the conflicts and power struggles inherent in tourism spaces, where various stakeholders compete for control and influence. This encompasses debates over the management of sacred sites, disputes over the development of tourism infrastructure, and tensions surrounding cultural representation within the industry.

Theme 4. Ethical Challenges in Tourism: Ethical considerations are a significant focus, with discussions on responsible tourism practices, the impacts of tourism on local communities and environments, and the ethical implications of commodifying cultural and religious practices for tourist consumption. These discussions delve into the questions of fairness, sustainability, and respect for cultural heritage.

Theme 5. Understanding Tourist Behaviour and Experiences: Exploring tourist motivations, behaviours, and experiences is a recurring theme, with studies examining why people visit certain destinations, how they interact with local cultures, and the role of mindfulness in enhancing tourist experiences. This theme sheds light on the diverse motivations and impacts of tourism on individuals and communities.



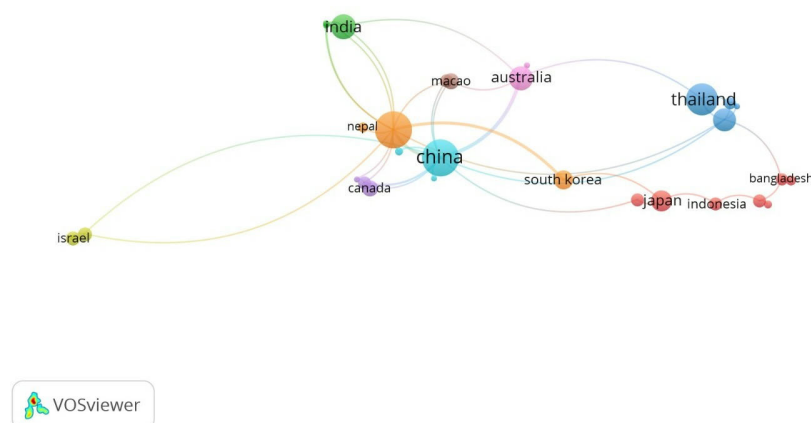
Bibliometric Mapping

Co-authorship Network of Countries

The Co-authorship Network of Countries unveils intriguing insights into international scholarly cooperation.

Figure 6

Co-authorship Network of the Countries



Source: *Bibliometric Analysis by the Author*

Notably, the United States emerged as a central node, establishing collaborative links with researchers from 13 other countries. China closely followed, engaging in partnerships with representatives from 11 nations. Meanwhile, countries such as the United Kingdom and India exhibit collaboration networks, with ties to 6 and 5 other countries, respectively. Australia, despite its geographic isolation, maintains active collaborations with researchers from 5 countries. Conversely, Thailand demonstrates a more localised network, engaging closely with researchers from 3 partner nations. Analysing such networks not only illuminates the dynamics of international collaboration but also highlights opportunities for fostering interdisciplinary partnerships.

Co-occurrence of All Keywords

In conducting the keyword analysis of the bibliometric dataset, a minimum keyword occurrence threshold of 5 was applied to filter out less frequent terms. Consequently, only keywords that appeared at least 5 times in the literature were included in the analysis. This approach ensured that the analysis focused on the most relevant and prevalent topics within the research domain. The keyword analysis of the bibliometric dataset, conducted using VOSviewer, revealed several key insights into the research landscape of Buddhist Tourism.

The most frequently occurring keywords were identified, including Tourism (50), Religion (35), Buddhism (35), China (26), and heritage tourism (24). These keywords provide an overview of the predominant themes and topics within the literature.

The keyword co-occurrence analysis conducted using VOSviewer uncovered strong associations between several key clusters of keywords within the literature on Buddhist Tourism. These clusters represent interconnected research areas and thematic groupings-

Cluster 1: Tourism Management and the Market

Keywords: China, cultural influence, heritage tourism, tourism development, tourism economics, tourism management, tourism market, tourist attraction, tourist behaviour.

Cluster 2: Cultural and Spiritual Tourism

Keywords: Authenticity, cultural tourism, Japan, perception, religious tourism, spiritual tourism, spirituality, temple stay.

Cluster 3: Cultural Heritage and Sustainability

Keywords: Asia, cultural heritage, culture, Eurasia, Far East, religion, sustainability.

Cluster 4: Buddhism and Pilgrimage

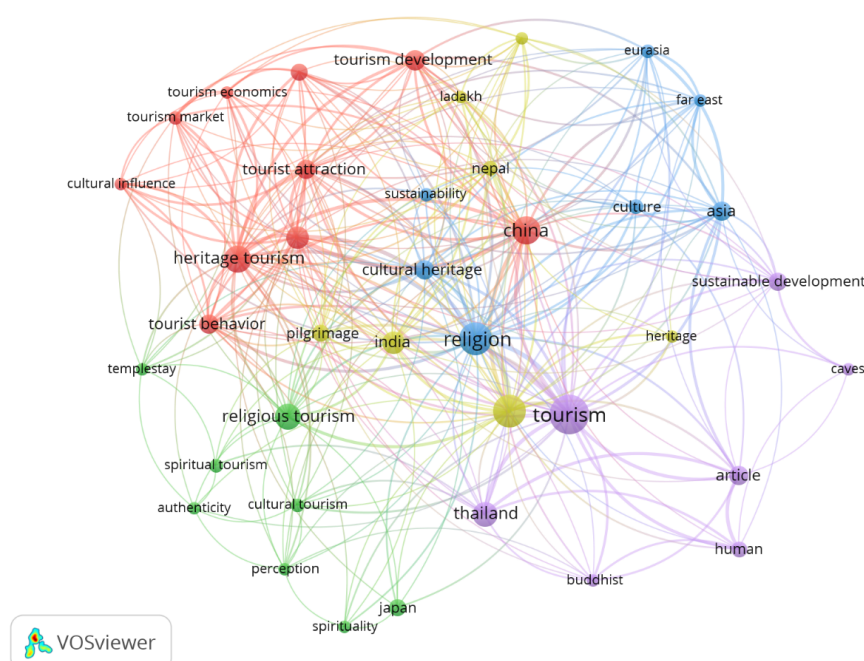
Keywords: Buddhism, heritage, Himalayas, India, Ladakh, Nepal, pilgrimage.

Cluster 5: Sustainable Development and Tourism

Keywords: Article, Buddhist, caves, human, sustainable development, Thailand, tourism.

Each cluster, visualised as a separate node in the network representation, encapsulates coherent topics or themes within the research domain. Furthermore, the visualisation of clusters facilitated the exploration of the thematic organisation of the literature and provided valuable insights into the structure of the research landscape.

Figure 7
Co-occurrence of All Keywords



Source: *Bibliometric Analysis by the Author*

Discussion

This study offers significant contributions to the understanding of Buddhist tourism, revealing both theoretical and practical insights that are valuable for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers alike. By analysing trends in scholarly publications, the study captures the evolving trajectory of Buddhist tourism research, with a noticeable surge in academic interest recently. This surge reflects the growing prominence of Buddhist tourism as an academic field, with increasing attention to the intersections of spirituality, sustainability, and cultural preservation. The findings underscore the multidimensional nature of Buddhist tourism, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities it presents for future research and practice.

Theoretical Contributions

One of the key theoretical contributions of this study is the exploration of cultural commodification in the context of Buddhist tourism. As sacred sites and religious practices become part of the tourism industry, there is an evident shift in their role from spiritual sanctuaries to marketable commodities. This transformation leads to what has been described as the commercialisation of cultural heritage—a phenomenon where cultural traditions are commodified for economic gain, sometimes at the expense of their intrinsic value and authenticity. The findings support the theory of cultural exploitation, which highlights how tourism commodifies sacred spaces, leading to ethical dilemmas regarding cultural integrity and spiritual authenticity. Researchers such as Nyaupane (2015) and Errington (1998) have long recognised this tension, suggesting that the growing commodification of religious tourism may undermine the spiritual sanctity of these sites, reducing their cultural and religious significance.

Additionally, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on the representation of identity in Buddhist tourism. Buddhist destinations serve as arenas for the negotiation of cultural and ethnic identities, particularly in regions like China, India, and Thailand, where Buddhist sites are deeply interwoven with national identity construction. As Ryan & Gu (2010) and Wong & Ryan (2013) & Ryan (2013) have demonstrated, Buddhist tourism can play a central role in shaping not only the perceptions of visitors but also the self-representations of local communities. These destinations, in many ways, become sites of both cultural affirmation and negotiation, where national and local identities are both reinforced and reshaped. This study extends this understanding by revealing how Buddhist tourism functions as a platform for identity construction in an increasingly globalised and interconnected world.

The ethical dimensions of tourism, particularly the balance between cultural preservation and sustainability, emerge as another crucial theoretical contribution of this study. The analysis aligns with the growing body of literature that emphasises the importance of responsible tourism practices. Scholars like Wong et al. (2016) and Ryan & Gu (2010) advocate for a form of tourism that respects local traditions and minimises the environmental and cultural degradation that often accompanies mass tourism. The study's findings demonstrate that there is a need for ethical tourism policies that promote sustainable development in Buddhist destinations. These policies should not only preserve the physical integrity of sacred sites but also safeguard the spiritual authenticity of Buddhist practices and traditions, which are often at risk due to over-commercialisation and external pressures.

Finally, the study's findings also highlight the role of sustainability in the theoretical landscape of Buddhist tourism research. As the global tourism industry becomes increasingly focused on sustainable practices, it is clear that the future of Buddhist tourism will depend heavily on the integration of sustainability principles in both policy and practice. This reflects broader trends in the tourism industry, where



sustainability is no longer a peripheral concern but a central tenet of development. The intersection of spirituality, culture, and sustainability in Buddhist tourism provides a fertile ground for further theoretical inquiry, especially in how these themes intersect with local community engagement and global tourism flows.

Practical Implications

The practical implications of this study are wide-reaching, with important insights for tourism managers, policymakers, and other stakeholders involved in Buddhist tourism. Understanding tourist motivations is crucial in crafting more personalised and spiritually fulfilling experiences for visitors. The findings highlight that tourists visiting Buddhist destinations are often motivated by desires for spiritual fulfilment, personal transformation, and mindfulness practices. Recognising these motivations enables destination managers to tailor tourism offerings that meet the spiritual and emotional needs of visitors while ensuring that the authentic nature of the Buddhist sites is maintained. For instance, meditation retreats, spiritual workshops, and cultural immersion activities could be integrated into tourism experiences to align with the deeper spiritual goals of visitors, rather than focusing solely on surface-level tourism attractions.

Moreover, the study emphasises the importance of addressing the management challenges faced by sacred sites in Buddhist tourism. The commercialisation of these sites presents a clear risk to their cultural and religious integrity. As tourist numbers rise, the balance between accessibility and preservation becomes increasingly difficult to maintain. Effective management strategies are needed to ensure that Buddhist destinations can accommodate tourists while simultaneously safeguarding their spiritual sanctity. Scholars such as Huang & Pearce (2019) and Nyaupane et al. (2015) have argued that sustainable tourism practices are essential in this context. These practices should focus on ensuring that tourism development respects the religious and cultural values of local communities while simultaneously contributing to the economic well-being of the area. This can include regulated visitor flows, community-based tourism initiatives, and policies aimed at reducing the environmental footprint of tourism.

The study also underscores the importance of global cooperation in addressing the challenges faced by Buddhist tourism destinations. The analysis of the co-authorship network reveals a global scholarly collaboration, with significant contributions from scholars in the United States, China, and Australia. This international collaboration is reflective of the global nature of Buddhist tourism research, where cross-border cooperation can be instrumental in tackling shared challenges. The need for international cooperation is particularly pertinent regarding site preservation, tourist behaviour management, and community engagement. Policymakers and tourism stakeholders must collaborate across borders to ensure that the integrity and authenticity of Buddhist destinations are protected while fostering sustainable tourism growth.

Theoretical and Practical Synthesis

The combination of theoretical insights and practical implications in this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the contemporary challenges facing Buddhist tourism. As Buddhist sites become more integrated into the global tourism economy, it is crucial that both scholars and practitioners recognise the interconnectedness of cultural preservation, sustainability, and ethical tourism practices. The theoretical frameworks proposed by scholars in the field provide valuable guidance, but the practical implications highlighted by this study serve as a call to action for those involved in tourism management and policy development.



This research shows that the future of Buddhist tourism lies in the harmonious integration of cultural heritage conservation, tourist experience enhancement, and sustainability practices. Scholars, tourism practitioners, and policymakers must work together to ensure that Buddhist destinations are not merely commodified but are managed in a way that respects both their spiritual essence and their role in the broader tourism ecosystem.

In conclusion, the bibliometric analysis of Buddhist tourism research highlights a field that has grown significantly in recent decades. The findings underscore the importance of theoretical contributions related to cultural commodification, identity dynamics, and ethical tourism, while also shedding light on the practical implications for sustainable management and authentic visitor experiences. However, the study also reveals several gaps, particularly in terms of document diversity, geographical representation, and emerging research themes.

Future research should address these gaps by broadening the scope of publications, incorporating more diverse geographical perspectives, and capturing the evolving trends in the academic study of Buddhist tourism. By doing so, the field can gain a more holistic understanding of Buddhist tourism's complexities, ensuring its continued relevance to both academic inquiry and practical tourism management.

Limitations and Future Directions

While the bibliometric analysis offers valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the scope of document types included in the dataset is limited, with most publications being journal articles, book chapters, and conference papers. A wider range of publication types, such as books and non-English language publications, could provide a more comprehensive view of the global discourse on Buddhist tourism. Future studies should consider expanding the dataset to include these materials.

Second, the study is based on bibliometric data up until 2023, which provides a snapshot of the field's development but does not capture the most recent shifts in research focus. A longitudinal analysis incorporating publications from post-2023 could offer insights into emerging trends, particularly considering recent global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on tourism. It would also be useful to examine the impact of these changes on the sustainability and ethical concerns of Buddhist tourism.

Another limitation is the geographical bias in the academic production of Buddhist tourism research. While countries like the United States, China, and Australia dominate the scholarly landscape, nations with rich Buddhist traditions, such as Thailand, India, and Sri Lanka, are underrepresented. This skew could affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research should aim to include a broader representation of global perspectives, particularly from Southeast and South Asia, where Buddhist tourism has deep cultural roots.

The analysis of keywords in the bibliometric data also reveals a constraint, as the study focused only on terms that appeared at least five times. This approach excludes potentially important emerging themes in Buddhist tourism. To capture a more comprehensive range of research trends, future studies could adjust the keyword threshold, allowing for the inclusion of new and underexplored topics such as digital tourism, mindfulness tourism, and post-pandemic tourism.



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