

Research on religion and spirituality in China: A bibliometric analysis based on the Web of Science

Rubén Carlos Álvarez-Diez, José Ricardo López-Robles

(Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, Mexico)

Abstract: Research on religion in China is of critical importance due to its impact on society, culture, and politics within the country and in an increasingly interconnected global context. There is a pressing need in academic and scientific realms to understand and analyze the core research themes conducted in this field over the past decade. The relevance of such research lies in their ability to establish a common framework that facilitates collaboration among researchers and consolidates existing knowledge. By identifying major research and areas of academic activity, this common framework opens the door to greater integration and synergy among academics in this field. Furthermore, this framework benefits researchers in the field of religion in China and offers opportunities to expand and deepen understanding of related topics such as sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies. To do that, a comprehensive analysis has been developed using bibliometric techniques and methodologies to identify and evaluate the most significant research on religion in China over the last ten years. This approach enables the visualization of emerging trends, areas of interest, and significant contributions in the field, providing a comprehensive overview of current research. This analysis addresses this demand using bibliometric tools, techniques, and methodologies. Finally, it underscores the importance of understanding recent research on religion in China and how bibliometric analysis can significantly contribute to academic and scientific collaboration and identify new avenues of inquiry in this dynamic and complex field.

Key words: religion, spirituality, China, knowledge mapping, bibliometrics

Rubén Carlos Álvarez-Diez: Academic Unit of Accounting and Administration, PhD in Administration, Autonomous University of Zacatecas. S/N, Fraccionamiento Progreso, 98066, Zacatecas, ZAC, Mexico.

José Ricardo López-Robles (corresponding author): Academic Unit of Accounting and Administration, PhD in Administration, Autonomous University of Zacatecas. S/N, Fraccionamiento Progreso, 98066, Zacatecas, ZAC, Mexico. E-mail: ricardolopezrobles@outlook.com

Introduction

The Role of Religion in China from a Research Perspective

Religion is a core element in the competitiveness of countries and regions due to its profound influence on various aspects of human and social development. Firstly, religion can significantly impact economic development by shaping attitudes toward work, business ethics, and wealth accumulation. Religious beliefs often promote honesty, responsibility, and solidarity, which are

fundamental to economic success and business competitiveness. These values can also drive corporate social responsibility initiatives that contribute to sustainable development^{1,2}.

From a political perspective, religion plays a significant role in the stability and governance of a country or region. Religious institutions often serve as pillars of social cohesion, providing a sense of identity and community. However, religious tensions can also pose political challenges if not managed properly. Collaboration between religious and governmental actors can be crucial in promoting tolerance and interreligious dialogue, thereby strengthening political stability^{3,4}.

Socially, religion influences cultural norms and social behaviors that impact societal cohesion and well-being. Religious communities are often important vehicles for delivering social services such as education, healthcare, and community assistance, contributing to human development and overall societal welfare⁵.

Religion can influence research and innovation in the academic and technological spheres by providing ethical and philosophical frameworks that guide scientific and technological development. For example, certain religions advocate for the valuation of knowledge and the preservation of the environment, which can influence research priorities and technological development⁶.

Religion has a multifaceted impact on the competitiveness of countries and regions. Religion can significantly affect economic, political, social, academic, and technological development by influencing values, social norms, and individual and collective behaviors. Understanding and properly managing the religious dimension is essential to fostering an environment conducive to sustainable growth, stability, and comprehensive progress in nations and regions.

In this regard, the relationship between religion and the aspects of development discussed earlier can be particularly intriguing when applied to China. Historically, China has had a complex relationship with religion, with policies ranging from strict regulation to periods of greater tolerance. Understanding how religion influences various facets of development in China requires a nuanced analysis^{7,8}.

Economically, religious values can impact entrepreneurship and business practices in China. Despite being officially atheist, Chinese society has seen a resurgence of interest in traditional

1 Komasi, H., Zolfani, S. H., & Nemati, A. (2023). Evaluation of the social-cultural competitiveness of cities based on sustainable development approach. *Decision Making: Applications in Management and Engineering*, 6(1), 583-602.

2 Sudarti, K., & Fachrunnisa, O. (2020). Religiosity competitiveness on knowledge conversion: a new approach to boost adaptive selling capability. *BISNIS & BIROKRASI: Jurnal Ilmu Administrasi dan Organisasi*, 27(1), 1.

3 Çokgezen, M., & Hussien, M. S. (2021). The impact of government interference to religion on religious giving: Evidence from European countries. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 32(2), 414-429.

4 Henne, P. S. (2020). Government interference in religious institutions and terrorism *The Correlates of Religion and State* (pp. 66-85): Routledge.

5 de Botton, L., Aiello, E., Padrós, M., & Melgar, P. (2021). Solidarity actions based on religious plurality. *Religions*, 12(8), 564.

6 Davoodi, T., & Lombrozo, T. (2023). Scientific and religious explanations, together and apart *Conjunctive explanations* (pp. 219-245): Routledge.

7 Madsen, R. (2020). Religious policy in China *Handbook on religion in China* (pp. 17-33): Edward Elgar Publishing.

8 Żychowska, M., Chornomordenko, I., Kravchenko, I. L., Gnatiuk, L., Dmytrenko, A., Urakina, A., & Smilka, V. (2022). The influence of religious and worldview factors on the landscape design in Japan and China. *Landscape Architecture and Art*, 21(21), 115-123.

values and ethics, often associated with Confucianism and Buddhism. These values can influence business conduct, emphasizing integrity and community welfare, contributing to sustainable economic growth^{9, 10}.

Politically, religion intersects with governance and stability in China. The Chinese government closely manages religious affairs, seeking to balance religious freedom with state control. Religious groups that align with state interests are often encouraged, while those perceived as challenging authority face restrictions. Managing religious diversity is essential to maintaining political stability and social cohesion¹¹.

Socially, religion in China plays a role in shaping cultural norms and community services. Buddhism and Taoism have deep historical roots in Chinese society, influencing art, architecture, and rituals. Religious communities also provide social services, especially in rural areas with limited government support, contributing to social welfare and cohesion¹².

Academically and technologically, China's approach to research and innovation is influenced by cultural and ethical considerations, including those shaped by traditional Chinese philosophies and religions. For example, concepts of harmony and balance derived from Confucianism and Taoism can inform environmental and technological policies, emphasizing sustainability¹³.

Briefly, religion's impact on development in China is multifaceted and evolving. Understanding how religious values intersect with economic, political, social, academic, and technological dimensions is crucial for comprehending China's complex development trajectory and its unique approach to managing religion within its broader societal framework¹⁴.

Bibliometric Analysis and Visualization

Given the importance of religion in various aspects of human and social development, it is crucial to understand the primary lines of research being pursued in this field and related areas of knowledge. The use of bibliometric tools and techniques becomes essential for gaining a comprehensive and up-to-date understanding of this research landscape¹⁵.

9 Lu, L., & Wu, Y. (2020). Does religion enhance firm performance? Evidence from private firms in China. *China Economic Review*, 62, 101480.

10 Su, K. (2022). Religion, government intervention and crash risk: lessons from China. *Applied Economics*, 54(43), 4930-4951

11 Guo, T. (2020). Politics of love: Love as a religious and political discourse in modern China through the lens of political leaders. *Critical Research on Religion*, 8(1), 39-52.

12 Chen, K., Guo, W., Kang, Y., & Wan, Q. (2021). Does religion improve corporate environmental responsibility? Evidence from China. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 28(2), 808-818.

13 Wang, S., & Jones, G. A. (2021). Competing institutional logics of academic personnel system reforms in leading Chinese Universities. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 43(1), 49-66.

14 Zhang, C., & Lu, Y. (2020). The measure of Chinese religions: Denomination-based or deity-based? *Chinese journal of sociology*, 6(3), 410-426.

15 Chen, S. (2023). *Social Work, Mental Health, and Public Policy in China: A Comparative-Historical and Theoretical-Practical Approach* *Social Work, Mental Health, and Public Policy in Diverse Contexts: Chinese and Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (pp. 3-11): Springer.

Firstly, bibliometric analysis can identify emerging trends in research on religion in specific contexts, such as China. This involves mapping recent scientific publications and highlighting the most addressed thematic areas, such as the relationship between religion and economic, political, social, academic, and technological development.

Additionally, bibliometric tools enable evaluating productivity and impact of researchers and institutions in this field, revealing thought leaders and significant collaborations. This is critical for fostering collaboration among scholars and strengthening research networks around religion and related areas^{16, 17}.

In the context of China, where religion significantly impacts various aspects of society, understanding the primary lines of research and trends can provide valuable insights to inform public policies, development strategies, and community actions. Knowing the priority research areas related to religion in China can open new opportunities to address social challenges and promote more inclusive and sustainable development.

Using bibliometric tools and techniques is essential for mapping and understanding current research on religion and related fields, especially in contexts like China. This provides a more comprehensive view of the research landscape and offers fundamental insights to advance knowledge and address contemporary challenges related to religion and its impact on socioeconomic and cultural development.

To achieve this, conducting an analysis of performance and bibliometric networks provides an appropriate framework to facilitate a comprehensive, comparative, and objective assessment of the primary research themes related to religion and to evaluate their evolution over time. Additionally, this approach will aid in identifying potential opportunities and research gaps, thus supporting informed decision-making for future research, development, and innovation initiatives in this domain.

In light of the above considerations, this research endeavor aims to visualize and comprehend the intellectual structure of the field of religion in China utilizing VOSviewer bibliometric software. This will be accomplished by assessing key bibliometric performance indicators such as publications, citations received, authors, and geographic distribution, among others, and by generating science maps to depict the interconnections and thematic patterns within this scholarly landscape¹⁸.

16 Şenel, E. (2022). Health and Chinese beliefs: A scientometric analysis of health literature related to Taoism and Confucianism. *Journal of religion and health*, 61(4), 2663-2678.

17 Zhou, X. (2022). Bibliometric Analysis of Chinese Journals of Religion Between 1994 and 2021. Paper presented at the 2022 5th International Conference on Computing and Big Data (ICCBD).

18 López-Robles, J. R., Otegi-Olaso, J. R., Porto-Gómez, I., Gamboa-Rosales, H., & Gamboa-Rosales, N. K. (2020). La relación entre Inteligencia de Negocio e Inteligencia Competitiva: un análisis retrospectivo y bibliométrico de la literatura de 1959 a 2017. *Revista Espanola de Documentacion Cientifica*, 43(1), e256.

Methodology

Dataset and Methodology

To determine the research themes related to religion in China and identify which of these are the most relevant in terms of impact and relationship, a bibliometric analysis was developed to evaluate the performance of the field under consideration, as well as the mapping of the main themes, authors and organizations between 2014 and 2023^{19, 20, 21}. For this purpose, a methodology was developed in three stages using VOSviewer software as a central tool, these being: i) data retrieval and processing^{22, 23, 24}; ii) elaboration and normalization of the scientific maps^{25, 26, 27}; and iii) visualization and analysis of the main relationships in the research themes^{28, 29}.

In this context, the bibliometric analysis and scientific maps were developed considering 2,421 publications available in the Web of Science™ Core Collection database from 2014 to 2023. These publications and their bibliographic information (year of publication, title, authors,

19 Gamboa Rosales, N. K., Celaya-Padilla, J. M., Galván-Tejada, C. E., Galván-Tejada, J. I., Luna-García, H., Gamboa-Rosales, H., & López-Robles, J. R. (2022). Infotainment systems: Current status and future research perspectives toward 5G technologies. *Iberoamerican Journal of Science Measurement and Communication*, 2(1).

20 López-Robles, J. R., Otegi-Olaso, J. R., Porto-Gómez, I., & Cobo, M. J. (2019). 30 years of intelligence models in management and business: A bibliometric review. *International Journal of Information Management*, 48, 22-38.

21 van-Eck, N. J., & Waltman, L. (2010). Software survey: VOSviewer, a computer program for bibliometric mapping. *Scientometrics*, 84(2), 523-538.

22 Gamboa Rosales, N. K., Celaya-Padilla, J. M., Galván-Tejada, C. E., Galván-Tejada, J. I., Luna-García, H., Gamboa-Rosales, H., & Robles, J. R. L. (2022). Infotainment technology based on artificial intelligence: Current research trends and future directions. *Iberoamerican Journal of Science Measurement and Communication*, 2(1).

23 Gontijo, M. C. A., Hamanaka, R. Y., & de Araujo, R. F. (2021). Research data management: a bibliometric and altmetric study based on Dimensions. *Iberoamerican Journal of Science Measurement and Communication*, 1(3), 1-19.

24 Trejo Guardado, R., Alejandro Carmona, E. A., Goretti López Verver y Vargas, H., Jiménez Hernández, I. S., Pérez Martínez, N. G., & Vázquez Trejo, B. Y. (2022). Opportunities and applications of smart contracts: A vision from the business, academic and scientific literature. *Iberoamerican Journal of Science Measurement and Communication*, 2(2).

25 Choi, Y.-C., & Jang, J.-H. (2023). An analysis of cooperation networks related to research projects between universities in the Chungcheong region in Korea: Suggestions for strengthening university networks. *Iberoamerican Journal of Science Measurement and Communication*, 3(3), 5.

26 Hernández, N. (2021). Mapping the thematic evolution in Communication over the first two decades from the 21st century: A longitudinal approach. *Iberoamerican Journal of Science Measurement and Communication*, 1(3), 1-10.

27 Tiwari, P., Chaudhary, S., Majhi, D., & Mukherjee, B. (2023). Comparing research trends through author-provided keywords with machine extracted terms: A ML algorithm approach using publications data on neurological disorders. *Iberoamerican Journal of Science Measurement and Communication*, 3(1), 2.

28 Issais Gutiérrez, A. R., & Martínez Espinosa, J. C. (2024). Building and sustainability information modeling: An analysis of its thematic structure. *Iberoamerican Journal of Science Measurement and Communication*, 4(1), 1-15.

29 Kappi, M., & Biradar, B. S. (2023). Quantifying the influence of Indian optics research: An index based on three citation indicators. *Iberoamerican Journal of Science Measurement and Communication*, 3(1).

affiliation, country, journal or congress, citations, among others) were compiled in plain text using the following advanced query:

WC = (RELIGION) AND PEOPLES R CHINA (COUNTRIES/REGIONS) AND ARTICLE (DOCUMENT TYPES) AND 2023 OR 2022 OR 2021 OR 2020 OR 2019 OR 2018 OR 2017 OR 2016 OR 2015 OR 2014 (PUBLICATION YEARS)

The query and scientific maps were carried out in English, considering that more than 75% of the documents are in this language and that the remaining percentage also have a title, abstract, and keywords in English, thus ensuring the analysis of all the existing documents. All the retrieved records were analyzed to ensure their relevance and homogeneity, thus avoiding duplicating any form. In cases where there was a difference or lack of information, the entire document was examined for classification.

In addition, the bibliometric indicators were analyzed, including the knowledge areas addressed, author productivity based on the number of publications, the sources of information and the countries. Finally, the *VOSviewer* bibliometric tool was used to plot and visualize the scientific maps, which groups the keywords included by the authors in their publications, called research themes. Finally, the *VOSviewer* bibliometric tool was used to visualize the scientific maps, which groups the keywords included by the authors in their publications called research topics. These themes have a minimum co-occurrence of 10 times and a minimum link strength of 50 relationships, ensuring weight and representativeness within the analysis. Lastly, the principal research links are recorded, ensuring the appearance of the most relevant research themes with the highest number of interactions, thus facilitating the definition of a common conceptual structure and the temporal analysis of their evolution.

Results

A Bibliometric Performance Analysis

Studies and research related to religion, both in China and worldwide, are experiencing notable growth and expansion in academic and scientific interest. This trend represents a significant opportunity for developing new knowledge and deeper perspectives on the role of religion in contemporary society.

This increase in research activity also opens doors for increased collaboration among stakeholders, including scholars, researchers, educational institutions, religious organizations, and governmental entities. Collaborative efforts in religious studies can lead to more holistic and multidisciplinary approaches to addressing complex issues related to religion, such as its impact on social, political, economic, and cultural development.

Given this growth landscape and emerging collaboration, it is imperative to establish a common framework that effectively harnesses the efforts of all involved parties. A common framework would provide clear guidelines on research objectives and methods, promoting coherence and synergy among different projects and actors. This would facilitate the identification of emerging trends, knowledge gaps, and opportunities for innovation in religious studies.

Furthermore, a common framework could contribute to standardizing methodologies and metrics used in religious studies, enabling comparison and cross-analysis across different studies and contexts. This would strengthen the validity and credibility of research and allow for the development of more robust and shared databases, benefiting the broader academic and scientific community.

In this regard, Figure 1 illustrates the growth of publications and accumulated citations in studies of religion in China over the years, revealing a compelling trend of increasing interest and significance in this research domain. Examining the progression, evolution, and anticipated future trajectory based on the data extracted from the Web of Science™ Core Collection offers valuable insights into the development of academic research in this field.

Firstly, there is a clear and consistent rise in publications from 149 in 2014 to 439 in 2023. This upward trajectory signifies a substantial expansion in scholarly output focused on studying religion within the Chinese context. The growing volume of publications suggests a heightened academic interest and engagement with religious topics over the years.

Accompanying this increase in publications is the notable growth in accumulated citations, which surged from 9 in 2014 to 2880 in 2023. The escalating number of citations reflects the rising impact and recognition of research conducted in the field of religion in China. This accumulation of citations indicates that the findings and insights from these studies resonate within the academic community and influence scholarly discourse.

The bibliometric data from 2014 to 2023 reveal a substantial level of productivity in publications, totaling 2,421 articles. Out of these, 2,603 citations were received, with 2,283 coming from external sources (excluding self-citations). The total number of times these publications were cited amounts to 2,047, of which 2,566 are external citations. This indicates an average of approximately 1.26 citations per item, reflecting a moderate level of impact and influence within the field. The h-index, a measure of both productivity and citation impact, is calculated at 18, suggesting that 18 articles have each been cited at least 18 times. Overall, these metrics highlight a productive and moderately impactful body of research, with potential for further growth and visibility in the academic community.

Based on the observed trends, it is reasonable to anticipate further expansion and advancement in studies of religion in China. The ongoing increase in publications suggests a sustained commitment to research in this area, likely fueled by evolving sociocultural dynamics and academic interests. This growth trajectory is likely to be accompanied by a continued rise in accumulated citations, indicating a deepening influence and relevance of this research within the broader academic landscape.

Several contributing factors may underpin this growth, including increasing scholarly engagement with religious issues in China, advancements in academic infrastructure and resources, and a growing recognition of the importance of religious studies in understanding societal

dynamics. The expected future behavior points towards a continued expansion of knowledge and understanding in religion within the Chinese context, with implications for broader academic scholarship and societal discourse.

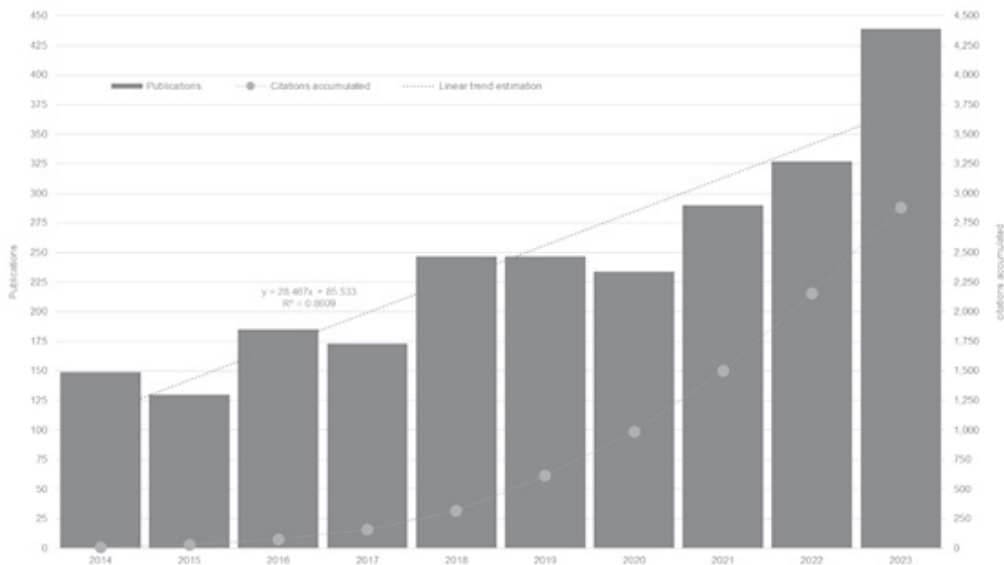


Figure 1. Distribution of publications and citations by year of religion in China field according to the data extracted from Web of Science™ Core Collection.

The growth of studies and research on religion presents a valuable opportunity to advance knowledge and promote interdisciplinary collaboration. Establishing a common framework is essential to maximizing the impact of these collective efforts and developing a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the role of religion in contemporary society, both in China and globally.

In this way, Table 1 presents all of the above points according to data extracted from the Web of Science™ Core Collection between 2013 and 2023. This table allows understanding of the evolution of religious studies in China, exploring several critical aspects that offer insightful perspectives on this academic field. Identifying and analyzing these elements provides a more nuanced and contextualized view of how this knowledge area has developed over time.

Table 1 reveals significant patterns and contributors shaping the field. Key authors like Welter A, Koenig HG, and Loke AT represent diverse perspectives and research agendas, underscoring their substantial impact on scholarly discourse. Countries like the United States, England, and Saudi Arabia dominate research output, highlighting global participation and diverse cultural influences in this field. English emerges as the predominant language of publication, reflecting widespread international engagement, while Chinese also plays a significant role, given the focus on Chinese religious contexts. Leading journals like “Religions” and “Logos Pneuma Chinese Journal of Theology” are important platforms for disseminating research, facilitating scholarly dialogue and knowledge exchange. It is important to mention that the International “Journal of

Sino-Western Studies” has also been identified as a reference in the development of the field. Additionally, the interdisciplinary nature of religious studies is evident through subjects like Asian Studies, Philosophy, and Psychology, demonstrating the broad scope and multidimensional approach to understanding religion’s societal and cultural implications.

Table 1. Performance of the main bibliometric indicators in the field of religion in China according to the data extracted from Web of Science™ Core Collection.

Indicator	(Publications) Description
Most productive authors	(63) Welter A (41) Koenig HG (27) Loke AT (20) Loke ATE (19) Jasper D; Lai PC
Most productive countries (*)	(254) United States of America (54) England (45) Saudi Arabi (34) Australia (27) Germany
Most used languages	(1,819) English (583) Chinese (4) French; German; Russian; Spanish (1) Italian; Korean; Portuguese
Most productive sources	(472) Religions (240) Logos Pneuma Chinese Journal of Theology (198) International Journal of Sino-Western Studies (172) Journal for the Study of Christian Culture (90) Sino Christian Studies
Most productive subjects (**)	(249) Asian Studies (139) Philosophy (100) History (88) Psychology (66) Public Environmental Occupational Health

(*) All publications evaluated include at least one author from China. The countries listed are the most productive behind China with 2,421 publications.

(**) All the publications evaluated are within the subject Religion (2,421). The subjects listed correspond to those publications that are found in more than one topic.

Review and Science Mapping

Considering the evolution and identification of key agents and application areas in the field of study, it is highly relevant to analyze how the main research topics covered relate to each other and how they have evolved over recent years using scientific maps generated in VOSviewer. Based on bibliometric analysis, these scientific maps visually depict relationships between different research themes and concepts, identifying thematic clusters, emerging connections, and predominant focus

areas in scientific literature. By examining the evolution of these maps over time, it becomes possible to discern trends, shifts in research priorities, and the emergence of new areas of interest, providing a comprehensive and dynamic view of knowledge evolution in the field of study and facilitating the identification of future research directions and interdisciplinary collaboration. Through this analytical approach, a deeper understanding of the field's structure and development can be achieved, contributing to better strategic guidance and ongoing advancement of knowledge in the discipline.

Table 2 and Figure 2 show the most relevant themes in the field of religious studies in China, using data collected from the Web of Science™ Core Collection. In this regard, concepts with a minimum occurrence of 10 are represented with different colors, grouping closely related ideas into “clusters.” For example, topics highlighted in red address aspects such as “daoism,” “Confucianism,” and “Buddhism.” The thickness of the lines connecting the themes indicates the strength of the relationship; a thick line between “confucianism” and “buddhism” represents a strong connection with a strength of 7.

A total of 46 themes have been identified, concentrating 1,171 occurrences and 1,608 links. These themes are grouped into the following clusters: Religious and Philosophical Studies (Red | 481 | 471), Mental Health and Well-being (Green | 376 | 914), and Religion and Society (Blue | 314 | 233).

The most relevant cluster in terms of occurrences and themes within is Religious and Philosophical Studies (Red | 481 | 471). This theme encompasses various areas related to religion, philosophy, and associated cultural and ethical practices. The specific points mentioned, such as adolescents, attitudes, belief, Buddhism, Chinese religions, Confucianism, Daoism, ethics, filial piety, folk religion, impact theory, Islam, mindfulness, music, mysticism, nature, philosophy, politics, ritual theory, and shamanism, reflect the thematic diversity within this field. From the study of specific religions like Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Islam to philosophical concepts such as ethics and political philosophy and cultural practices like ritual music and mystical experiences in nature, all these points converge in exploring beliefs, practices, and theories that shape societies and human experiences within religious and philosophical contexts.

In this connection, the cluster Mental Health and Well-being (Green | 376 | 914) is the most connected and the second in terms of occurrences. This cluster addresses aspects related to mental health, emotional well-being, and overall quality of life, including topics such as anxiety, depression, happiness, health, life satisfaction, mental health, personality, religiosity, satisfaction, social support, spirituality, and stress. All these aspects are interconnected within the context of mental health and psychological well-being, exploring how factors like religiosity, spirituality, social support, and life satisfaction impact mental health and overall satisfaction with life. This theme encompasses a comprehensive perspective considering physical, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions of human well-being.

The third cluster in terms of occurrences and connections is Religion and Society (Blue | 314 | 233). It encompasses various aspects related to the interaction between religious beliefs,

practices, and institutions with broader societal and cultural dynamics. Themes such as behavior, Catholicism, Christianity, church-state relations, community, culture, faith, justice, modernity, political theology, secularization, and Sino-Christian theology all fall within this theme. They explore how religion shapes and is shaped by social structures, cultural norms, political contexts, and theological perspectives within contemporary societies. This theme delves into the complex interplay between religion and various dimensions of human society, shedding light on religious influence, adaptation, and transformation in modern contexts.

The connection among these areas lies in how religious and philosophical beliefs impact emotional and social well-being and how religious institutions and spiritual ideas contribute to forming cultural and social identities. Interdisciplinary research in these domains seeks to understand the complexity of human experience about religion, philosophy, and their roles in shaping society and mental health.

Table 2. Most relevant themes and clusters in the field of religion in China according to the data extracted from Web of Science™ Core Collection.

Thematic groups (clusters) (color occurrences total link strength)	Themes (occurrences total link strength)
Religious and Philosophical Studies (Red 481 471)	daoism (79 50); confucianism (72 66); buddhism (67 63); belief (28 50); education (20 19); ethics (19 20); mindfulness (17 31); ritual theory (17 13); politics (15 9); islam (14 14); music (14 17); philosophy (14 8); attitudes (13 25); chinese religions (13 7); impact theory (13 24); adolescents (12 24); shamanism (12 4); filial piety (11 6); nature (11 5); folk religion (10 8); mysticism (10 8);
Mental Health and Well-being (Green 376 914)	spirituality (70 144); health (45 101); mental health (41 99); depression (40 107); religiosity (37 78); involvement (24 79); social support (24 69); life satisfaction (23 62); anxiety (20 47); happiness (15 39); stress (14 38); personality (12 27); satisfaction (11 24);
Religion and Society (Blue 314 233)	christianity (130 82); faith (30 32); sino-christian theology (22 8); church-state relations (21 10); catholicism (20 4); culture (16 20); modernity (16 12); justice (14 11); community (13 5); behavior (12 20); political theology (10 2); secularization (10 17);

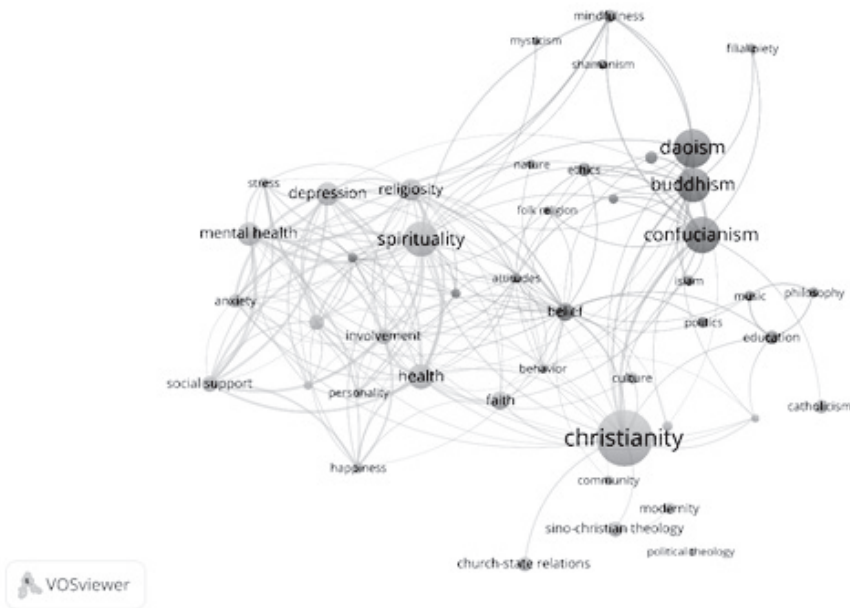


Figure 2. Main research themes related to religion in China field according to the data extracted from Web of Science™ Core Collection.

In this light, the low level of collaboration among authors in the field, likely due to its novelty and specialization, presents an opportunity rather than a disadvantage. This scenario allows for identifying research themes that can foster cooperation and support the field’s growth. Despite the limited collaboration, it is crucial to recognize the emergence of potential research avenues that could benefit from increased cooperation and interdisciplinary engagement (see Figure 3).

Furthermore, identifying a co-authorship network led by Koenig HG (see Figure 4), one of the most productive authors in the field, is noteworthy. This network has the potential to facilitate collaboration, knowledge exchange, and the development of cohesive research agendas. By leveraging leadership within this co-authorship network, researchers can capitalize on existing expertise, forge new collaborations, and collectively advance the field’s knowledge and impact.

In summary, while the current level of collaboration among authors may be modest due to the field’s specialization, it offers an opportunity to strategically identify and cultivate research partnerships that can drive innovation, enhance cooperation, and ultimately contribute to the field’s growth and development. The presence of established co-authorship networks, particularly led by influential figures like Koenig HG, underscores the potential for collaborative efforts to shape the trajectory of research in this emerging domain.



Figure 3. Main authorship networks related to religion in China field according to the data extracted from Web of Science™ Core Collection.

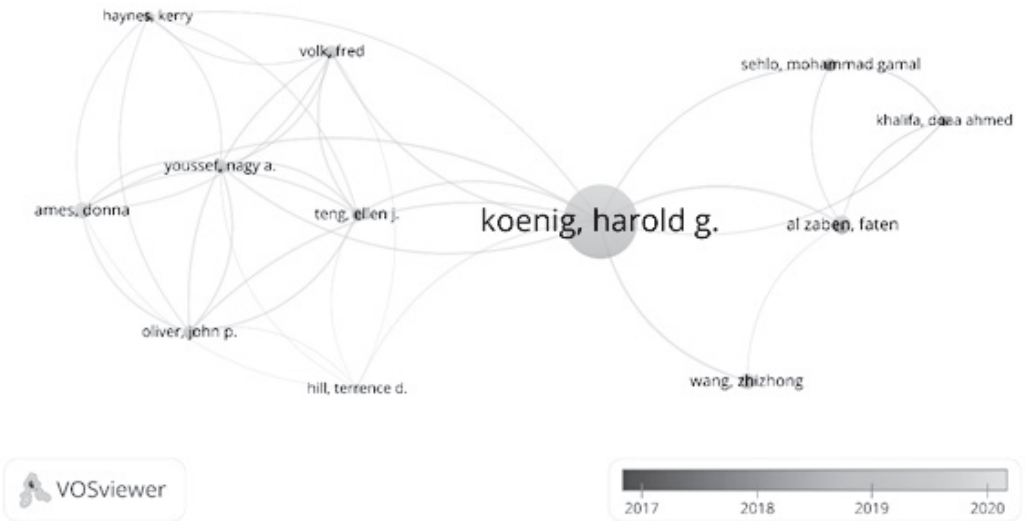


Figure 4. Co-authorship network related to religion in China field according to the data extracted from Web of Science™ Core Collection.

The origin or residence of authors from different countries can significantly impact the growth and diversification of the field of study. Analyzing results by authors' country of origin or residence provides valuable insights into regional perspectives and cultural influences that contribute to research development in the field.

Firstly, the geographic diversity of authors enriches the field by bringing diverse cultural perspectives and contextual experiences. Authors from different countries can introduce unique approaches based on the religious, political, and social traditions of their respective backgrounds, promoting a broader and more global understanding of the topics addressed in the study.

Additionally, the presence of authors from various countries fosters international collaboration and the creation of transnational academic networks. Collaboration among researchers from different parts of the world facilitates the exchange of ideas, methodologies, and resources, promoting synergy and innovation in the field.

Furthermore, analyzing results by country can reveal geographically underrepresented areas that could benefit from increased focus and research attention. Identifying these gaps can stimulate diversification and balance in the global distribution of knowledge within the field of study.

In this regard, Figure 5 shows the co-authorship relationship from a country perspective. This figure shows how China is the country from which research converges to other countries or regions, but also reveals links between them. This means that new links are being established that favor the development of knowledge knowledge development from an international perspective.

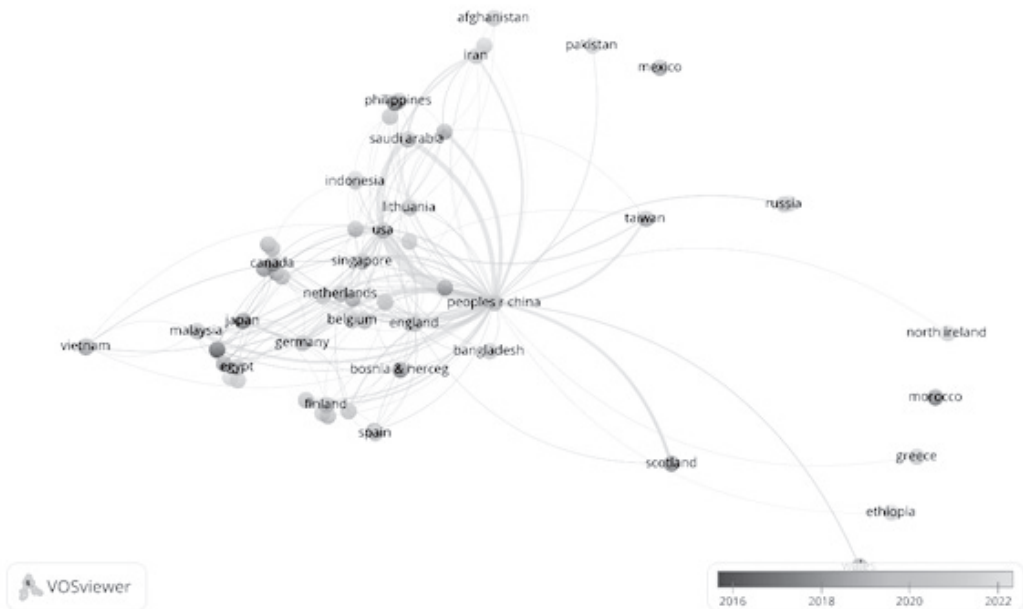


Figure 5. Most productive countries and regions related to religion in China field according to the data extracted from Web of Science™ Core Collection.

Based on the above, Figure 6 shows the evolution of the identified themes, which is moving towards greater integration and synergy. In this way, the expected evolution, considering the previous responses on topics related to religion, philosophy, mental health, and society, involves greater integration and interdisciplinary collaboration in studying these fields. Advances in these areas are anticipated to lead to a deeper understanding of how religious beliefs, philosophical values, and spiritual practices impact mental health, human well-being, and social structures.

The convergence of research on religion, philosophy, and mental health suggests a holistic approach to addressing the complexities of human experience. This integrated approach is expected to foster broader and more enriching dialogue across different disciplines, thereby promoting new ideas, innovative approaches, and interdisciplinary collaborations.

Moreover, increased internationalization and diversification in studying these fields are expected, with authors and collaborators from diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds. This geographic diversity can enrich research perspectives and facilitate broader knowledge exchange and practices across different cultural and social contexts.

The expected evolution is towards a more dynamic, inclusive, and solution-oriented field of study where interdisciplinary research on religion, philosophy, mental health, and society significantly contributes to addressing contemporary challenges and enhancing human well-being globally. This integrated approach has the potential to yield tangible benefits at both academic and practical levels, influencing policies, clinical practices, and social interventions that promote greater understanding and resilience in communities.

Finally, the recent research trends have centered around the intersection of mental health, Daoism, and Buddhism, reflecting a growing interest in understanding how these areas influence well-being. The increased focus on mental health research underscores its importance in overall health and quality of life, with studies exploring how practices rooted in Daoism and Buddhism, such as mindfulness and meditation, can positively impact mental health outcomes like stress reduction and emotional resilience. Research into Daoism likely reflects interest in its holistic approach to health and harmony, emphasizing balance and nature. Similarly, studies on Buddhism investigate its teachings of mindfulness, compassion, and self-awareness to understand their effectiveness in enhancing psychological well-being. This surge in research highlights a broader recognition of the mind-body-spirit connection in promoting mental wellness, fostering interdisciplinary dialogue between Eastern philosophies and contemporary mental health science to improve outcomes in mental health care and wellness promotion.

The previous discussions serve as a framework to support the development of new research and collaborations within the field of religion from a Chinese perspective. Understanding the evolution of religious studies, the influence of religious beliefs on society, and the interplay with mental health provides valuable insights for future investigations. Researchers can explore cultural nuances, historical perspectives, and contemporary implications by identifying key themes like Daoism and Buddhism in Chinese contexts. This foundation encourages interdisciplinary

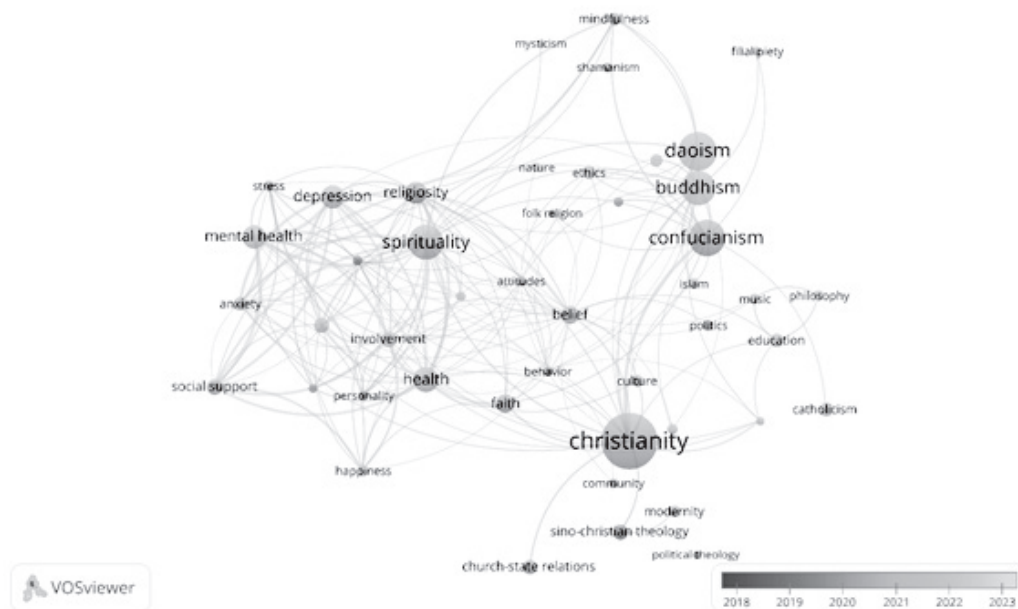


Figure 6. Evolution map of themes related to religion in China field according to the data extracted from Web of Science™ Core Collection.

approaches that bridge cultural, philosophical, and scientific domains, fostering innovative research agendas and international collaborations to advance understanding and address complex issues within the realm of Chinese religious studies.

Conclusions

In conclusion, religious studies is experiencing significant growth, and this trend is anticipated to persist and strengthen in the foreseeable future. Several key factors support this positive trajectory.

Firstly, the field benefits from a growing community of scholars who are increasingly specialized and productive in their research endeavors. Established scholars and emerging researchers alike are making substantial contributions, expanding the scope and depth of knowledge within religious studies.

Secondly, establishing and enhancing collaboration networks among researchers are fostering a culture of cooperation and knowledge-sharing. These collaborative efforts not only enhance the quality and impact of research but also facilitate interdisciplinary approaches that enrich our understanding of religious phenomena.

Furthermore, the field's openness and synergy with other disciplines are driving its evolution and expanding its relevance. By integrating insights from psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, and other related fields, religious studies gain new perspectives and approaches that deepen our understanding of human spirituality and its societal implications.

The promising growth of religious studies is sustained by the dedication and expertise of its researchers, the strength of collaborative networks, and the interdisciplinary nature of research. By embracing collaboration and synergies with other academic areas, religious studies will continue to thrive, advance our understanding of spirituality, and contribute meaningfully to broader intellectual discourse. This ongoing development underscores the importance and relevance of religious studies in addressing contemporary challenges and enriching our understanding of human experiences and beliefs.

On the other hand, the identified themes in the field of religious studies hold significant importance due to their influence across various aspects of human life and society at large. These themes represent foundational areas of inquiry that continue to evolve and are expected to play crucial roles in the study and understanding of religion in the future.

Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism are fundamental philosophical-religious traditions in Asia that have profoundly shaped cultures and societies in the region. These belief systems not only address spiritual and ethical questions but also offer unique perspectives on human nature, morality, and the pursuit of harmony with the universe.

The study of belief, spirituality, and religiosity provides deeper insights into how individuals interpret the world and find meaning in their lives. These topics are crucial for exploring the diversity of religious practices and the variety of spiritual expressions in different cultural contexts.

Moreover, aspects related to mental health, including depression, and the relationship between faith and health offer important perspectives on psychological and emotional well-being. The study of religiosity and its influence on mental health is increasingly relevant in a world seeking to integrate holistic approaches into healthcare.

Church-state relations, developments in Sino-Christian theology, and Catholicism are critical for understanding political and social dynamics in various global contexts. These topics reflect the interaction between religion and political power, as well as the evolution of religious institutions in relation to governance and society.

These identified themes represent significant areas of research in the study of religion that will continue to evolve in the future. They are expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of religious and spiritual diversity worldwide, as well as to inform contemporary issues related to mental health, politics, and culture. The ongoing study of these themes promises to enrich our knowledge and appreciation of the complexities of human experience in relation to religion and spirituality.

In conclusion, the field of religious studies is undergoing dynamic evolution characterized by interdisciplinary exploration, open collaboration across borders, and expanding networks of scholars. This growth is fueled by a diverse array of topics including Daoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, mental health, and church-state relations, which collectively contribute to a deeper understanding of spirituality and its impact on individuals and societies. The identified themes underscore the significance of ongoing research in exploring cultural nuances, historical contexts,

and contemporary implications of religious phenomena. Moving forward, continued scholarly engagement with these themes is essential for advancing knowledge, promoting global dialogue, and addressing complex societal challenges through the lens of religion and spirituality. This interdisciplinary approach holds promise for fostering greater empathy, understanding, and resilience in an increasingly interconnected world.

Acknowledgement

The authors acknowledge the support of Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas (UAZ), Consejo Nacional de Humanidades, Ciencias y Tecnologías (CONAHCYT), Consejo Zacatecano de Ciencia Tecnología e innovación (COZCYT) and Management, Evaluation and Training Processes of Public Policies of Mexico Academic Group (CA-206) to carry out this research.

标题

中国的宗教与灵性研究：基于科学网的文献计量分析

摘要：由于中国宗教对国内社会、文化和政治的影响，以及在日益相互关联的全球背景下，对中国宗教的研究至关重要。学术界和科学界迫切需要了解和分析过去十年在这一领域开展的核心研究课题。此类研究的意义在于它们能够建立一个共同框架，促进研究人员之间的合作并巩固现有知识。通过确定主要的研究和学术活动领域，这一共同框架为这一领域的学术界进一步整合和协同合作打开了大门。此外，该框架还有利于中国宗教领域的研究人员，并为拓展和深化对社会学、人类学和文化研究等相关主题的理解提供了机会。为此，我们使用文献计量学技术和方法进行了全面分析，以确定和评估过去十年中有关中国宗教的最重要研究。通过这种方法，可以直观地了解该领域的新趋势、关注领域和重要贡献，从而提供对当前研究的全面概述。本分析报告利用文献计量学工具、技术和方法满足了这一需求。最后，它强调了了解中国宗教最新研究的重要性，以及文献计量学分析如何极大地促进学术和科学合作，并在这一动态而复杂的领域确定新的探索途径。

关键词：宗教、灵性、中国、知识图谱、文献计量学

Rubén Carlos Álvarez-Diez：萨卡特卡斯自治大学会计与行政学术部，行政学博士。S/N, Fraccionamiento Progreso, 98066, Zacatecas, ZAC, Mexico.

José Ricardo López-Robles (通讯作者)：萨卡特卡斯自治大学会计与行政学术部，行政管理博士。S/N, Fraccionamiento Progreso, 98066, Zacatecas, ZAC, Mexico. 电子邮件：ricardolopezrobles@outlook.com