




Review

Analyzing the Progress in Chinese Tourism Research over the Past Decade: A Visual Exploration of Keywords and Delphi Surveys

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Abstract: Alongside the rapid development of China's tourism sector, the continuous increase in the number of academic articles and research findings related to tourism in China has expanded the related research topics. Using a visual exploration of keywords and Delphi surveys, this paper systematically summarizes the progress in tourism research in China. The findings show that the research topics of national parks, rural revitalization, virtual tourism, the tourism economy and all-for-one tourism were hotspots in Chinese tourism filed over the past decade. Research methodologies have evolved from qualitative concept clarification to combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. In the future, Chinese tourism research should be explored further to the unique theoretical underpinnings of tourism in China; innovative research should be fostered to achieve theoretical originality; and collaborations between academia and the tourism industry should be facilitated to enhance the practical implications of academic findings. The aforementioned research bottlenecks and corresponding measures, and research vision and prospects indicated in the paper can guide future research, and let Western scholars know the hotspots and future trends of tourism research from the Eastern perspective.



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1. Introduction

The tourism sector in China has experienced rapid development over the past decade [1]. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic over the past 3 years, the tourism sector has shown resilience and has been in gradual recovery in the postpandemic period [2]. The number of academic articles and research findings related to tourism in China has been increasing continuously and the related research topics have been expanding similarly [3].

Two of the most influential tourism journals in China were selected as the research objects in this study, *Tourism Science* and *Tourism Tribune* [4,5], whose impact factors, respectively, are 5.654 and 3.861. In China, they are the two tourism academic journals with the highest impact factors, the highest download numbers and the highest cited numbers. Moreover, these are the only two journals indexed in the Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index in China that are exclusively focused on tourism. While several other Chinese prestigious academic journals do accept tourism-related papers, their scopes encompass a variety of fields such as natural resources, market development, and ecosystem services. Therefore, selecting these two journals is highly representative for this study. A quantitative analysis of these journals was conducted using ROST CM6.0 and CiteSpace software (v. 6.1.R6 advanced) to examine 2704 articles from *Tourism Science* and *Tourism Tribune* published between 2012 and 2022. The reason why the year of 2012 was selected to be analyzed is that 2012 was a crucial year for China's tourism development. In 2012, the Tourism Law of the People's Republic of China (Draft) was submitted for initial review during the 28th meeting of the Standing Committee of the 11th National People's Congress [6]. The next year, China became the

third-largest destination for inbound tourism and a major consumer in outbound tourism worldwide [7,8]. From 2012 to 2019, China's domestic tourism, inbound tourism and outbound tourism developed unprecedentedly. However, 2020–2022 was the other extreme and a representative three years of China's tourism development. In the past three years, the epidemic has not only brought great confusion to China's tourism [9], but also caused great trauma to many other industries in the world. The decade from 2012 to 2022 can not only reflect the prosperity of China's tourism, but also reflect its depression affected by the epidemic. Therefore, in order to analyze the development of China's tourism from different angles, 2012 to 2022 is the selected time period for literature review.

In addition to the quantitative analysis, traditional literature review methods were employed to systematically review, compare, and summarize the findings, and analyze the emerging thematic trends. By employing the Delphi method after the quantitative analysis, the research team conducted a questionnaire survey among the members of Tourism Science's 6th Editorial Board. Throughout this process, the aim was to make certain judgments regarding the thematic trends recognized by quantitative research and the future research directions in the tourism literature.

Prior to the pandemic, scholars regarded the following research themes as the most prominent in Chinese tourism studies: China outbound tourism [10,11], China rural tourism [12–14], tourist behavior, tourism governance and policy issues, tourism economics issues [15], destination image, tourism marketing [3] tourism resource development and evaluation, tourism education and training, tourism reception, and ecotourism [16]. During and after the pandemic, scholars identified that smart tourism and virtual tourism are the most prominent in Chinese tourism studies [9,17].

Regarding analysis tools of literature reviews, because a visual exploration tool is capable of objectively processing massive amounts of scientific literature data as well as visualizing relevant information, in the academic field, there has been an increasing use of keyword visualization methods for analyzing literature themes. Commonly used visualization tools include CiteSpace, VOSviewer 1.6.20, Gephi 0.9.2, and ROST CM6.0 (the latter frequently appearing in Chinese literature reviews) [18,19].

According to the existing literature, there is a notable lack of reviews focused on tourism research within the unique context of China. Additionally, there is an absence of comprehensive and systematic analyses of the literature on Chinese tourism research from various perspectives, including the research background, content, and methodological characteristics of each research hotspot. Therefore, this paper aims to review and analyze Chinese tourism research in the aforementioned journals, addressing the following questions:

- (1) What are the key topics in Chinese tourism research?
- (2) What are the research backgrounds of these key topics?
- (3) How has the content of research on these key topics evolved over the past decade?
- (4) What are the characteristics of the research methods and content of these key topics?
How have these characteristics changed over time?

The paper will delineate research bottlenecks and corresponding measures, and the tourism research agenda, which can guide future research, and let Western scholars know the hotspots and future trends of tourism research from the Eastern perspective.

2. Research Data, Tools, and Methodology

A search of the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database was conducted using a "source of the literature" retrieval method with the search terms "tourism science" and "tourism tribune", which are the names of the target journals in this research study. We only input the names of two journals as keywords because, initially, we filtered all article titles from these two journals and then manually excluded articles irrelevant to our research objectives. The search period covered January 2012 to December 2022. Firstly, we screened the articles based on their titles. The following types of articles were classified as non-research-related papers: (1) annual summaries of the journals; (2) recruitment advertisements published by universities in the journals; (3) articles written by foreign scholars or Chinese scholars concerning outbound

tourism unrelated to Chinese tourism; (4) papers that were translated from published English articles; and (5) “written discussion” short articles, as they mostly represent opinion pieces rather than full research papers [3]. As a unique platform, editorial teams of tourism-related journals in China maintain a “written discussion” section in their journals to include invited short discussion papers around a nominated theme. After the first screening, a total of 2754 valid records were obtained for Tourism Science and Tourism Tribune.

The search results of CNKI, which included articles’ titles, abstracts and keywords of 2754 articles, were then exported into Excel and RefWorks formats. Merely screening by article titles may overlook “written discussion” short articles. Therefore, the author conducted a second round of screening by reading the abstracts of the articles, ultimately retaining 2704 valid records. In addition, some of the original literature was downloaded for subsequent co-occurrence and cluster analyses, in addition to tracing the research evolution path. The main tool used in this research was CiteSpace (CiteSpace is a freely available Java application for visualizing and analyzing trends and patterns in the scientific literature, designed and developed by Doctor Chen, professor in Drexel University) for cluster and burst analyses. The Excel and RefWorks results exported from CNKI were imported into CiteSpace, which automatically identified the keywords and performed clustering and burst analysis. ROST CM6.0 (ROST CM6.0 is a social computing platform developed and coded by Wuhan University in China to aid research in the humanities and social sciences) was used to perform word co-occurrence analysis to assist in the analysis of each topic cluster following the visualization results of CiteSpace.

In the context of tourism futures research, Delphi is one of the most widely used research methods [20], and it allows for a more in-depth exploration of the results of quantitative research [21]. After the aforementioned visual exploration of research keywords, using the Delphi method, email communications, and the online Sojump questionnaire platform, the research team conducted two rounds of comprehensive surveys among the members of Tourism Science’s 6th Editorial Board. Our criteria for selecting interviewees were as follows: university professors or researchers from academic institutions who had published extensively in leading tourism journals in China and internationally over the past decade, and who were highly cited authors. A total of 45 members from 44 universities across China, the USA, the UK, and the Australia participated in the Delphi survey. The questions from the first round in August 2023 are listed in Appendix A, and were based on the responses from the experts in this round, which were deleted, adjusted, and supplemented to create a new questionnaire. A second round of inquiries was then conducted and the responses were collected promptly. The objective of the two questionnaire rounds was to generate a relatively unified vision for tourism research in China. Based on the aforementioned quantitative and qualitative results, the research trends in the field of tourism in China over the past decade were summarized to provide insights and prospects for future research.

3. Research Hotspots and Evolution Paths

After excluding non-research-related papers published between 2012 and 2022, such as preambles, a total of 2704 articles were published in Tourism Science and Tourism Tribune. Table 1 presents the details of these citations among other details of the articles published in both journals.

Table 1. Relevant data for articles published in Tourism Science and Tourism Tribune in the past decade.

Details of the Articles Published in Tourism Science and Tourism Tribune	Relevant Numbers
Amount of AP *	2704
Total DN *	6,565,419
Average DN per article	1961
Total CN *	94,631
Average CN per article	37
Proportion of NNSF *	31.4%
Proportion of NSSF *	9.57%
Proportion of ME *	3.47%
Proportion of CUBSRE *	0.5%

* AP, articles published; DN, download number; CN, cited number; NNSF, National Natural Science Fund; NSSF, Proportion of National Social Science Fund; ME, Ministry of Education’s Humanities and Social Sciences Research and Planning Fund; CUBSRE, Central Universities’ Special Funds for Basic Scientific Research Business Expenses.

3.1. Analysis of Frequently Used Keywords

ROST CM6.0 was used to analyze the frequency of keywords in the articles published in *Tourism Science* and *Tourism Tribune* over the past decade and the results provide insights into the research hotspots in the field of tourism in China.

In order to explore more deeply the changing trends of tourism research topics in China, the research divided the past decade into the first 5 years (2012–2016) and the following 6 years (2017–2022) to detect the frequently used keywords from the two journals (Table 2). According to the table, after excluding keywords such as “tourism”, “tourism sector”, “tourists”, “influencing factors”, and “tourism development”, both journals frequently used the following keywords: “tourist destination” and “tourist experience”. This result indicates that these topics received significant attention in the tourism field. “Inbound tourism” and “tourism economy” are frequently used keywords as well. After the 2008 global economic crisis, there was a decline in the number of inbound tourists to China. In response to this trend, several articles from *Tourism Science* analyzed inbound tourism and its impact on the tourism economy from the perspective of tourist flows. There was a higher frequency of related keywords in *Tourism Tribune*, such as “rural tourism”, “rural revitalization”, and “all-for-one tourism”. Since 2006, Chinese government has paid close attention to rural revitalization. Since 2016, the concept of all-for-one tourism has been put forward. The tourism mode of Chinese tourists has changed from superficial sightseeing to in-depth tourism, which leads to increased interactions with various aspects of destinations. Tourism is no longer limited to the tourism industry alone but has become a collective effort involving the whole society, so the concept of all-for-one tourism is put forward.

Table 2. High-frequency keywords published in *Tourism Science* and *Tourism Tribune* in the past decade.

	2012–2016	2017–2022
Rank.	Keywords	Keywords
1	Tourist destination	National park
2	Inbound tourism	Tourism experience
3	Tourism economics	Rural tourism
4	Tourist experience	Tourist destination
5	All-for-one tourism	Tourism well-being

3.2. Keyword Clustering and Research Topic Evolutionary Pathway Analyses

CiteSpace is bibliometric analysis software that can calculate the hot keywords within a specific field; however, obtaining detailed results still requires manual reading and interpretation. By combining the analysis results from this software with the author’s review and understanding of the literature, this paper conducted a trend analysis of tourism research in China over the past decade.

Analyzing the evolutionary pathways within a field can reveal the development trajectory of research topics in that domain, which enables future trend predictions. CiteSpace’s Timeline feature facilitates the visualized analysis of these evolutionary pathways, while also including the relevant keywords in thematic clusters [22]. CiteSpace was used to draw visualized images depicting the evolutionary pathways for keyword clusters in the literature published in *Tourism Science* and *Tourism Tribune* from 2012 to 2022 (Figures 1 and 2). These images display the various thematic branches and their active years in addition to changes in the topics of interest in both journals over time.

In Figures 1 and 2, the Q values for the clustering modules in the two journals are 0.9499 and 0.8334, respectively, indicating significant clustering structures. The average silhouette values for the clusters were 0.9369 and 0.9468, respectively, indicating convincing clustering results for both journals [22]. All the keywords in the bimonthly journal *Tourism Science* were classified into 8 major clusters while those in the monthly journal *Tourism Tribune* were divided into 16 clusters. The obtained clusters in both journals represent important research branches in the field of tourism. After merging the overlapping and

similar clusters, a total of 12 major clusters were obtained: rural revitalization, national parks, tourist flows, tourist perceptions, tourist behavior, culture and tourism integration, smart tourism and virtual tourism, tourism economy, wellness tourism and environmental restoration, proenvironmental behavior, the Tourism Law, and all-for-one tourism. As shown in Table 3, the “tourist behavior” cluster has the highest publication volume with 81 articles because of its broad scope. Conversely, the “wellness tourism and environmental restoration” cluster has the lowest publication volume with 11 articles. In this study, due to the broad scope of “tourist behavior” and “tourist perceptions”, these concepts were integrated into other cluster analyses rather than being analyzed as separate clusters.

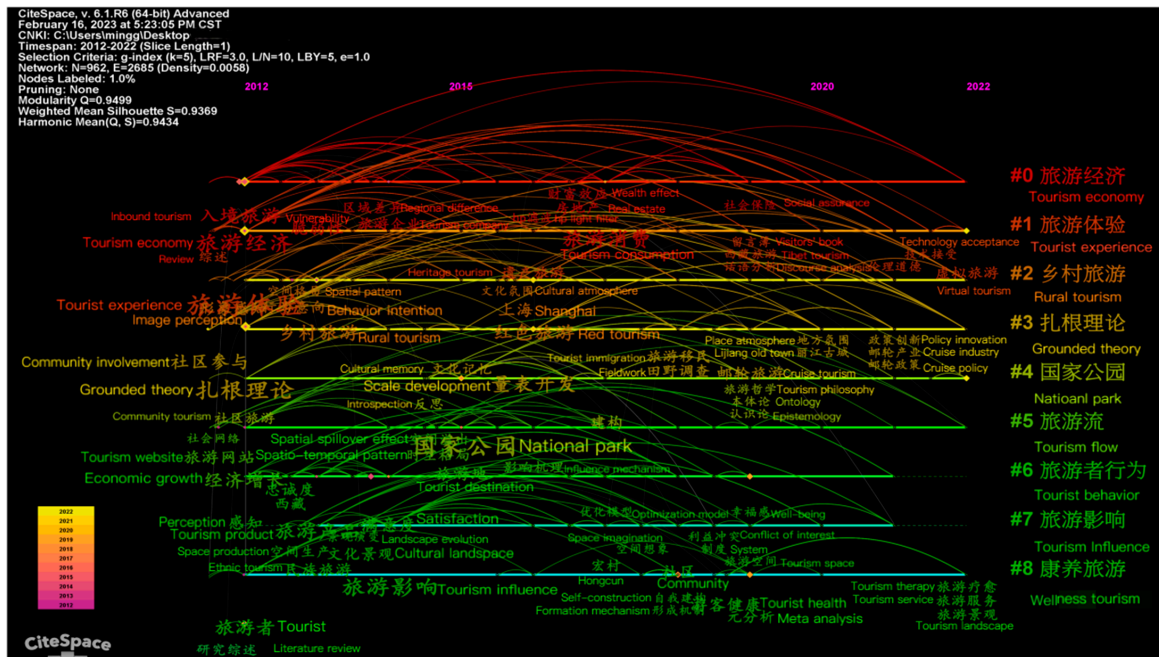


Figure 1. Timeline view of the evolution of research topics in Tourism Science in the past decade. (The size of the node is drawn according to its degree centrality).



Figure 2. Timeline view of the evolution of research topics in Tourism Tribune in the past decade. (The size of the node is drawn according to its degree centrality).

Table 3. Clusters of articles published in Tourism Science and Tourism Tribune in the past decade and the corresponding amount of articles published.

Clusters	Amount of Articles Published
Tourist behavior	81
Rural tourism, rural revitalization, sustainable development of traditional villages	58
National park	46
Tourist perception	46
Tourism law	43
Integration of culture and tourism	37
All-for-one tourism	22
Tourism economy	20
Tourism flow	20
Smart tourism, virtual tourism	18
Pro-environmental behavior	15
Wellness tourism, restorative environment	11

CiteSpace's burst detection feature allows for the identification of keywords that experience multiple bursts of activity within short periods of time, in addition to the start and end years for each burst [22]. However, CiteSpace does not exclude the possibility of the keyword appearing in the periods before or after the bursts. In this research study, using CiteSpace's burst detection feature with a γ value of 0.6 and a minimum period of 1 year, Table 4 shows the 12 burst keywords identified in the two journals. The three keywords with the highest burst intensity in Tourism Science were "national parks", "tourist experiences", and "tourist destinations", while the keyword with the largest period of use between the starting and ending years was "tourism sector". In Tourism Tribune, the corresponding burst keywords are "tourists", "all-for-one tourism and tourist experiences", and "rural revitalization and rural tourism". The above findings reveal the hot topics during a specific time period to some extent.

Table 4. Top 12 burst keywords in Tourism Science and Tourism Tribune from 2012 to 2022.

Rank.	Tourism Science				Tourism Tribune			
	Keywords	Strength	Starting Year	End Year	Keywords	Strength	Starting Year	End Year
1	Tourism listed company	1.79	2012	2012	Tourist *	7.96	2012	2013
2	Tourist destination *	2.26	2013	2013	World heritage	4.59	2012	2012
3	Rural tourism	1.11	2013	2014	All-for-one tourism *	7.02	2016	2016
4	Grounded theory	2.05	2014	2014	Tourism statistics	5.93	2016	2016
5	Tourism economy	1.62	2014	2016	Spatial justice	6.05	2017	2017
6	Service quality	1.62	2014	2016	Traditional village	3.12	2017	2019
7	Inbound tourism	1.53	2015	2017	Rural revitalization	3.64	2018	2022
8	Tourism industry	1.86	2016	2019	Rural tourism	3.39	2018	2022
9	National parks *	3.72	2017	2017	Tourism experience *	6.77	2019	2020
10	Meta analysis	2.1	2019	2020	Integration of culture and tourism	5.76	2019	2020
11	Virtual tourism	1.83	2022	2022	Educational tour	4.31	2020	2022
12	Tourism experience *	2.82	2021	2022	Epidemic prevention and control	5.21	2021	2022

Notes: Rank., ranking. * The top three burst keywords.

In the following, this paper presents a detailed explanation of the background, content, and characteristics of the self-conducted research, focusing on the clustering of articles in both journals, which have a considerable number of publications. Subsequently, the clustering of articles in each journal will be emphasized.

3.3. Rural Tourism, Rural Revitalization, and Sustainable Development of Traditional Villages

3.3.1. Research Background

The concept of “agritainment” (i.e., farmhouse tourism) emerged in the 1980s. In 1998, the former China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) promoted the annual theme for rural tourism several times. In addition, the construction of a socialist new countryside was proposed at the 5th Plenary Session of the 16th CPC Central Committee in 2005 [23]. Since 2006, China’s annual No. 1 Central Document has consistently focused on agriculture, rural areas, and farmers’ problems to facilitate rural revitalization. In 2023, China’s No. 1 Central Document proposed the implementation of the Exquisite Rural Leisure Tourism Project and the promotion of quality upgrades for rural homestays. These documents demonstrate the overall development trend in rural tourism from the 1980s to the present day [24].

3.3.2. Research Content

Agritainment has made rural tourism, rural revitalization, and poverty alleviation continuous research hotspots in the literature over the past 20 years. A decade ago, the authors in both journals focused on exploring the sense of community belonging or resistance toward tourism among local residents [25]. In 2018, *Tourism Tribune* launched a series of conversations by writing on “rural tourism facilitating rural revitalization” and “characteristic tourism towns” in the development of Chinese tourism. The keywords “rural revitalization” and “rural tourism” emerged prominently in 2018 and have continued to be relevant (Table 3). Among these conversations by writing, the topic of how to transform rural areas into urbanized towns and develop them as characteristic tourism towns was popular.

In recent years, the acceptance of farmers toward identity or occupational transitions has increased. Scholars began exploring the evolutionary process of residents in rural tourism destination transitioning from being “traditional farmers” into “professional rural tourism farmers” [26]. This development of rural tourism has led to a growing body of research on rural homestays [27].

3.3.3. Research Characteristics

The volume of publications in both journals in the period mentioned above showed a fluctuating upward trend, indicating a clear policy orientation. The first growth point occurred in 2014, with an upward trend in the volume of publications on rural tourism and rural revitalization in *Tourism Science*. In line with the national development strategy, the former CNTA and the Ministry of Agriculture issued a series of policies to promote rural tourism and rural revitalization, which led to the rapid development of rural tourism and an increase in the related research achievements during the 11th and 12th Five-Year Plan periods. The second growth point occurred in 2018, when the CPC Central Committee and the State Council issued the Opinions on Implementing the Rural Revitalization Strategy and the Rural Revitalization Strategy Plan (2018–2022). Accordingly, *Tourism Tribune* launched a series of related conversations by writing (Figure 3).

In terms of the journals’ contents, they have cross-integrated disciplines with a progressive deepening in theoretical research. This integration of theories from various disciplines, such as communication geography, sociology, and anthropology, has comprehensively employed qualitative and quantitative research methods. Theoretical frameworks, such as utopia, place attachment, stimulus–organism–response, tourist gaze, embedding–disembedding, stakeholder theory, and social exchange theory, combined with relative deprivation, comparative advantage, and competitive advantage theories, were applied in in-depth explorations of rural tourism and revitalization, which have promoted theoretical innovation and academic development. The highly central and frequently used keywords

in this cluster included “red tourism”, “image perception”, “cultural atmosphere”, “spatial pattern”, and “characteristic towns”, among others. In addition, the literature in this cluster has deepened the theory of tourist community conflict, expanded the theoretical framework for community attachment, enhanced existing theories of entrepreneurial motivation for rural tourism, and drawn certain inspirations from the theories of social stratification in sociology and tourism cultivation in anthropology [18].

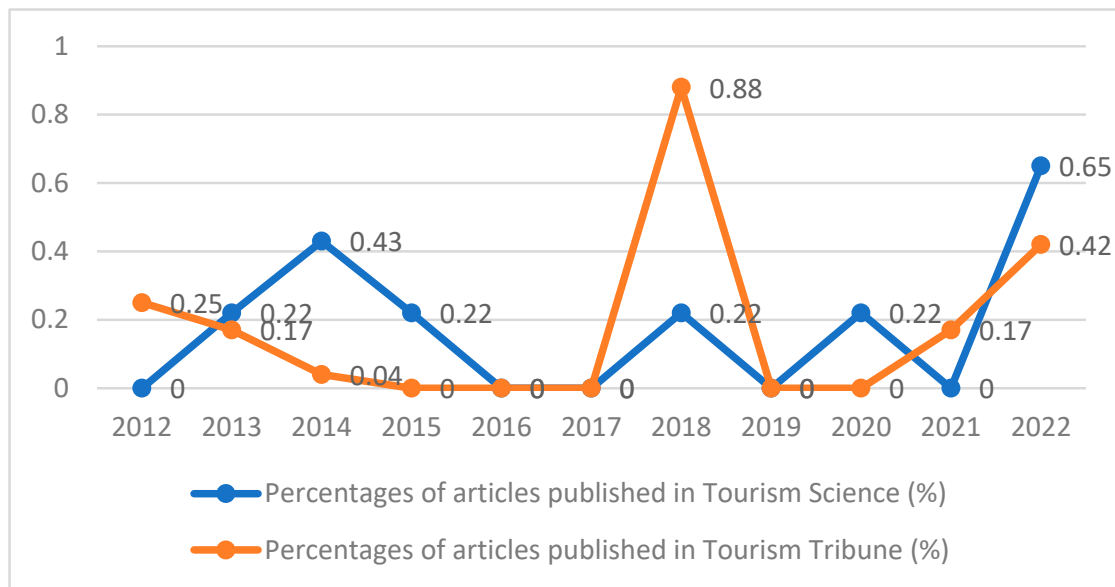


Figure 3. Percentage of rural tourism and revitalization articles published in the Tourism Science and Tourism Tribune in the past decade.

3.4. National Parks

3.4.1. Research Background

The pilot program for the national park system was launched in 2015 and has since received great attention from the academic community in China. Following years of development, the first national parks, including the Sanjiangyuan protected area, Giant Panda National Park, Northeast China Tiger and Leopard National Park, Hainan Tropical Rainforest, and Wuyi Mountain, were officially established in 2021 [28,29].

3.4.2. Research Content

Tourism Science published its first article on this topic in 2015, which proposed recommendations for the construction and sustainable development of the national park system by studying the United Kingdom’s national park system [30]. Because China’s national park system is still in an early stage, scholars have predominantly drawn lessons from foreign experiences to explore the sustainability of the Chinese national park system and its institutions [31]. In recent years, scholars have begun to explore how national parks may contribute to citizens’ well-being from the perspective of ecosystem services [32,33].

In 2015, the Tourism Tribune focused on the management and institutional innovation of national parks as a theme for its conversations by writing series. In addition to drawing lessons from the management experience of foreign national park systems, the journal also analyzed the relationships among heritage tourism, heritage conservation, and national park construction [34]. Subsequently, the journal’s thematic focus diversified to include park interpretation and educational services, land use, and the tourism life cycle [35,36]. In addition, the relationship between national parks, green tourism, and ecotourism has attracted attention, including how national parks may engage in ecotourism [37] and their protective green development models [38,39], as well as the ecologization of facilities [40] (Figure 4).

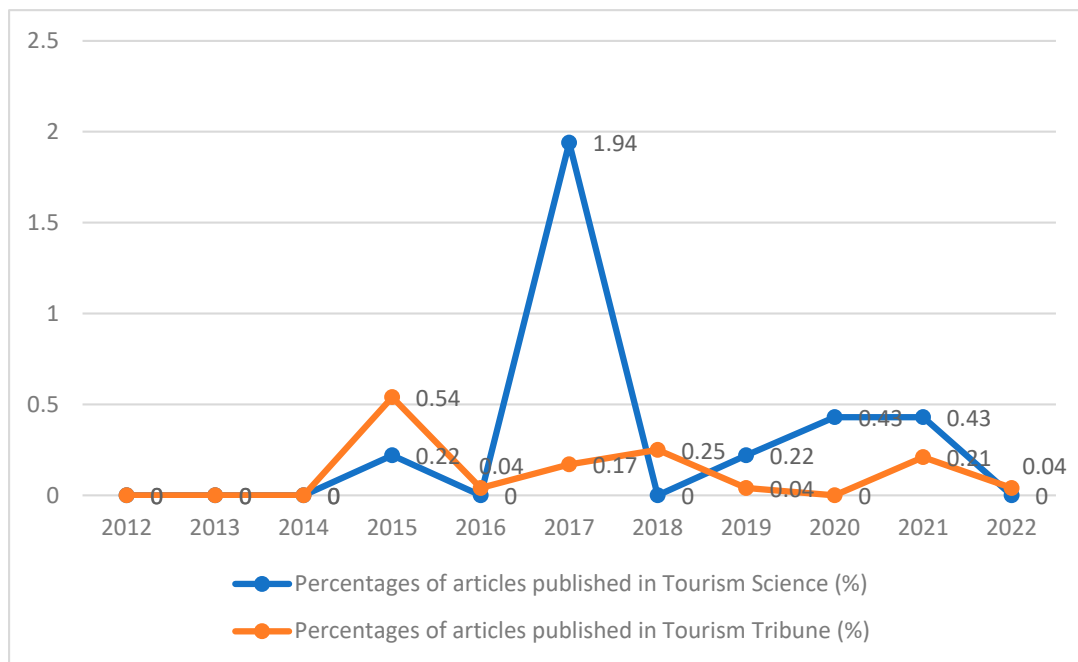


Figure 4. Percentage of articles on national parks published in the Tourism Science and Tourism Tribune in the past decade.

3.4.3. Research Characteristics

In terms of publication time and volume, 2015, 2017, 2020, and 2021 were the peak years. The publication volume of both journals showed an upward trend in response to China’s launch of the pilot national park program in 2015. In response to the issuance of the Overall Plan for Establishing the National Park System by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council in 2017, Tourism Science established a Special Issue and that year’s publication volume reached its highest point for nearly a decade. China established its first national parks in 2021 and Figure 5 shows that the publication volume in both journals had a fluctuating upward trend from 2018 to 2021.

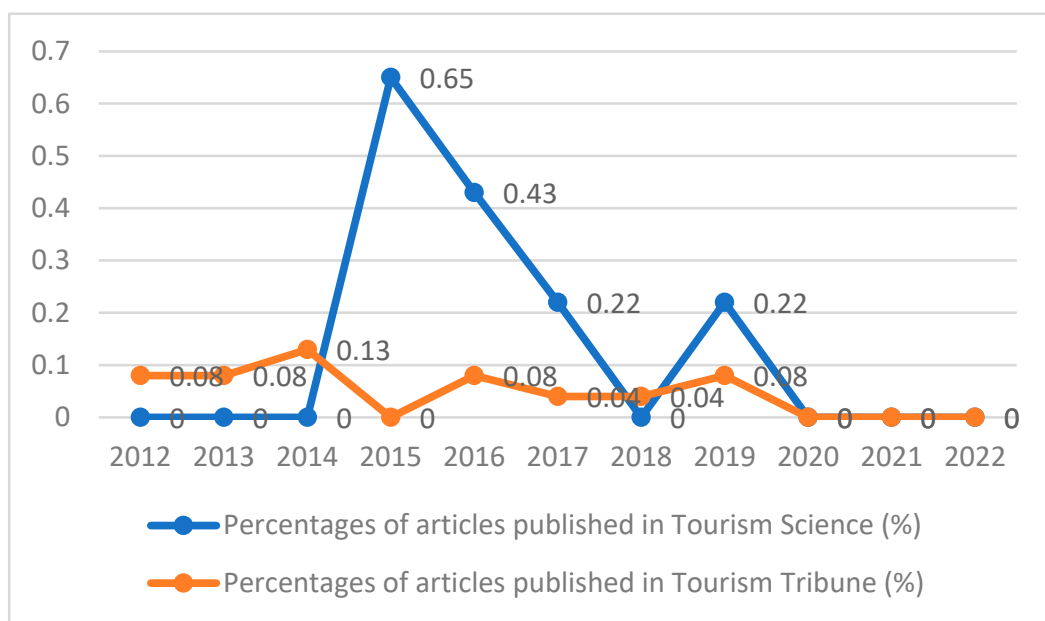


Figure 5. Percentage of tourist flow articles published in the Tourism Science and Tourism Tribune in the past decade.

Therefore, this surge in the volume of publications has shifted over time into a value orientation focused on publishing rational research and the progressive construction of theories. However, the publication volume in the two journals experienced a noticeable decline in 2018, which can be attributed not only to the establishment of a special theme issue in 2017 but also to the gradual shift of research characteristics from a surge in publications to the stabilization and rationalization of research in national parks. This shift in focus resulted in value orientations moving toward a greater focus on theoretical construction and subsequently increasing the national park research literature. The national parks' governance system was investigated based on the property rights theory and the dissemination and evolution of the concept was examined using "traveling theory" as a tool. The complex systems theory was applied to establish sustainable management frameworks and enterprise output management using complex systems management mechanisms. Collaborative relationships among ecotourism stakeholders were studied using the stakeholder theory. Centralized management-oriented national parks were explored based on the regulatory theory. The tourist area life cycle (TALC) model was divided quantitatively using the TALC theory for tourism geography. The characteristics of righteousness and benefit demonstrated by national parks in terms of citizens' willingness were examined based on the theory of new public services. In recent years, these discussions have expanded beyond single issues and primarily focus on four aspects of national park administration, such as the ecosystem services and green development of national parks, stakeholders, management models, governance systems, and visitor perceptions. Multidimensional and interdisciplinary system integration is the current publishing trend in the tourism literature.

Compared with Tourism Science, the articles on national parks published in Tourism Tribune mainly focused on qualitative research and literature-based quantitative analyses. In the early years, Tourism Science primarily published literature reviews, but there was a notable emphasis on quantitative research and model construction in studies of ecosystem services and recreation perspectives in recent years.

3.5. Tourist Flow Networks

3.5.1. Research Background

Following China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001, the country's tourism sector, particularly in- and outbound tourism, has developed rapidly. However, there was a decline in the number of inbound tourists due to the 2008 global economic crisis [41], which prompted many scholars to analyze the spatiotemporal distribution characteristics of inbound tourism in different years from the perspective of tourist flow networks to identify their diffusion patterns [42,43]. China entered the era of mass tourism during the 14th Five-Year Plan, where tourists' travel focuses gradually shifted from package tours to independent travel. Therefore, a single tourism route could no longer meet their demands, which led to the emergence of research interests in tourist flow networks. The relevant articles in both journals mainly focused on investigating the spatiotemporal patterns and structural characteristics of tourist flow networks.

3.5.2. Research Content

Characteristics of Spatiotemporal Patterns in Tourist Flow Networks: Considering timelines, current studies mainly focus on long-term periods, such as annual and quarterly periods, in combination with large geographical scales (e.g., national, regional, provincial, and city levels) to conduct macro-level analyses of the spatiotemporal patterns in tourist flow networks. Some studies have concentrated on time elements and visiting periods to examine the spatiotemporal distribution characteristics of individual tourists at different time points and segments in micro-level analyses [44]. In recent years, scholars have used system simulation models to predict the spatiotemporal distribution differences in tourist flow networks at different tourism scales [45]. Many studies have also employed geographical analysis methods, such as geographic information systems and path analyses, to investigate tourist flow networks [46]. Furthermore, some studies have combined

mathematical models to explore the underlying patterns behind the phenomena of tourist flow networks [47].

Characteristics of the Tourist Flow Network Structure: Many studies have employed social network analysis methods to analyze the characteristics of the tourist flow network structure according to two dimensions: node and network structures. Scholars have used various measures, such as node degree centrality, betweenness centrality, network density, and core-periphery structures, to examine the various relationships within tourist flow networks [48].

3.5.3. Research Characteristics

Considering the research timelines, many research articles focusing on inbound tourist flows using the keyword “tourist flow” were published from 2012 to 2017. Among these articles, Tourism Science predominantly featured the keyword “inbound tourism” with frequent occurrences. At that time, inbound tourism in China was sluggish, mainly for the following three reasons. From an economic perspective, the global economic downturn since 2008 has severely affected major source countries for inbound tourism, such as the United States and Japan, leading to a decline in tourists making travel plans to visit China. In the same year, the Chinese yuan appreciated, which increased the cost for foreign tourists to enter China. From a tourism perspective, China’s traditional tourist routes and landscapes struggle to attract foreign tourists compared with the lower-cost tourism activities available in Southeast Asia. Therefore, Chinese scholars have analyzed inbound tourism in China and proposed relevant suggestions for improvement from various angles: such as manipulating the currency value of the Chinese yuan, improving spatial correlation characteristics, comparing inbound tourism between China and the United States, highlighting the pattern of damage to inbound tourism during crisis events, and estimating the demand elasticity of inbound tourism [49,50], among others.

Considering the study contents, early research on tourist flow networks combined theoretical explorations and deductions with case studies, while later research focused more on modeling and quantification. Studies of spatiotemporal patterns and network structures deepened, and theories such as tourism fields, systems science, and embodied cognition in tourism were applied.

Considering methodologies, there was a shift from qualitative to quantitative research based on various theories, such as social networks, regional economics, and physics. The employed methods evolved from literature reviews and questionnaires to text mining and big data collection, among others. Following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of articles in related journals has declined in recent years. However, they should rebound in future. Therefore, future research could begin by simulating tourist flow networks to predict the changes in network structures under unforeseen circumstances.

3.6. Culture and Tourism Integration

3.6.1. Research Background

There is a tendency for tourism products to become more homogeneous in the era of globalization; therefore, personalized products are more likely to present tourists with unforgettable experiences. These personalized experiences can be derived from the distinctive folk cultures at tourism destinations. Therefore, efforts have been made to enhance China’s soft power and encourage the integration of the inheritance and protection of folk cultures with the development of tourism products [51]. Folk culture in China is closely related to the Chinese people’s lives owing to their lifestyles, habits, emotions, and beliefs [52]. Integrating culture with tourism activities can facilitate a stronger emotional connection between tourists and destinations, leading to unforgettable and high-quality experiential outcomes [53].

In 2018, the CNTA and the Ministry of Culture were merged into the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Following this merger, several planning documents were issued, including the Cultural Development Plan for the 14th Five-Year Plan Period, the 14th Five-Year Plan for Tourism Development, and the Opinions of the General Office of the State Council on Further Stimulating the Potential of Cultural and Tourism Consumption.

3.6.2. Research Content

Consequently, the development of research into the integration of culture and tourism has surged recently. *Tourism Tribune* introduced various themes for its conversations by writing in recent years, such as the relationship between culture and tourism in 2019, the integrated development of cultural city construction and tourism in 2020, and key areas and trends in the innovative integration of online culture and tourism in 2021. The *Tourism Tribune's* highly central and frequently used keywords included “cultural identity”, “cultural tourism”, “cultural tourism industry”, “cultural heritage”, “social welfare”, “tourist attractions”, and “collaborative development”. Researchers have also paid significant attention to the deepening of theoretical understandings of culture and tourism integration. Research has also investigated the institutional and policy aspects of culture and tourism, the synergistic effects, mechanisms, and impacts of culture and tourism, and the integration of cultural tourism and technologies [54,55]. *Tourism Science* focused on cultural heritage from various perspectives, such as cultural heritage tourism, collaborative developments in cultural heritage and tourism, and the relationship between ancient villages, agricultural cultural heritage tourism sites, and local residents. The above-mentioned research outcomes in the field of culture and tourism integration were fruitful, with diverse themes, deepening theories, and a complementary combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches emerging in the literature.

3.6.3. Research Characteristics

Considering the timeline of changes in cultural tourism, the government published a series of policies promoting the integration of culture and tourism in 2018, which led to a rapid increase in related research. *Tourism Tribune* published the first relevant articles in 2019, while the number of related articles in *Tourism Science* consistently fluctuated and increased from 2012 to 2022. The publication volume of cultural tourism contents in both journals peaked in 2020 (Figure 6).

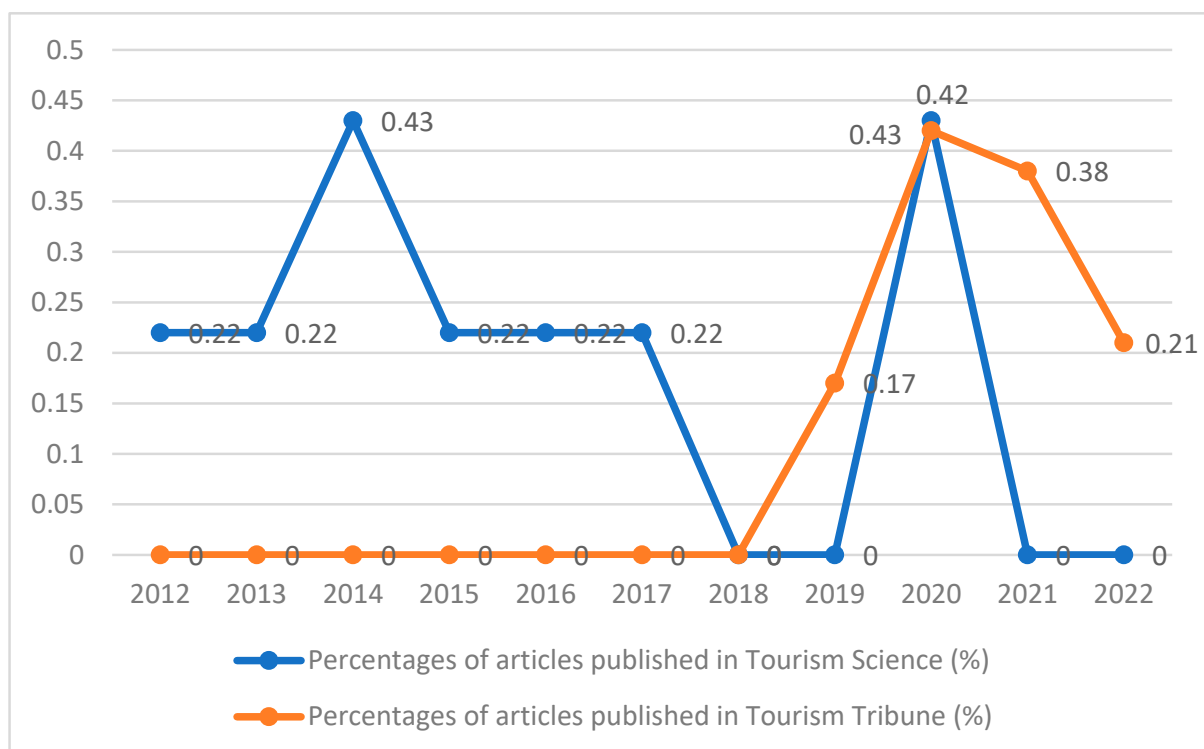


Figure 6. Percentages of integration of culture and tourism articles published in the *Tourism Science* and *Tourism Tribune* in the past decade.

Considering the cultural tourism contents, earlier studies in the literature sample were more focused on literature reviews, case analyses, and explorations of new models using qualitative methods. In later studies, there was a shift toward quantitative methodologies, that focused on mechanisms and influencing factors in particular. The main research themes were primarily distributed in rural tourism, cultural heritage, ethnic areas, institutional policies, and online/digital cultural tourism. The applied theoretical frameworks included cultural landscapes, cultural reproduction, social interactions, new public services, local attachment, and local identity. Future studies have the potential for further breakthroughs in deepening theoretical understanding, interdisciplinary research, and the integration of different regional characteristics.

3.7. Smart Tourism and Virtual Tourism

3.7.1. Research Background

In 2008, IBM Corporation proposed the “Smart Cities” and “Smart Earth” concepts. In 2014, the CNTA declared the theme of smart tourism, which marked a qualitative leap in the tourism sector through the use of information technologies. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the rapid development of virtual tourism, with terms such as VR, augmented reality (AR), and immersive experiences becoming increasingly common in the literature. Studies in the postpandemic era have focused on how to maintain tourists’ experiential satisfaction and meet their tourism demands using virtual tourism products in the face of unforeseen circumstances. Some results of studies indicate that companies’ VR adoption hinges on their tech investment, VR’s strategic perception, and pandemic impact awareness. Prior VR experience and perceived tech support also matter. VR emerges as a valuable sustainable strategy for tourism firms amid pandemic challenges. Innovating business models with VR to foster new destination relationships and diversify tourist consumption patterns could address seasonal activities, enhancing their appeal despite limited availability for tourist engagement [56,57]. Hence, using VR and AR to enhance on-site tourism experiences became a research hotspot during and after the COVID-19 pandemic [17,58,59].

3.7.2. Research Content

1. Smart Tourism. Following the emergence of the “smart” concept internationally and the advent of an era of intelligent public services, smart tourism has experienced a research boom. Over the past decade, the highly central and frequently used keywords appearing in both journals included “big data”, “cross-disciplinary”, “mass tourism”, “tourist demand”, “tourism+”, “modeling analysis”, “analytical software”, “cloud services”, “national economy”, and “information sharing”. In 2012, Tourism Tribune initiated a call for articles exploring the theme of “tourism public services and destination development” by focusing on the construction of smart tourism and tourism public service systems and websites, as well as improving quality standards [60]. The early published articles primarily focused on the preliminary stages of clarifying concepts and constructing theoretical frameworks, with scholars avoiding simply repackaging tourism e-commerce and digitized scenic spots using the “smart” term. In the middle and later stages of the sample, both journals published more articles that focused on the impact of tourism and the Internet on smart tourism and the tourism sector [61,62] in addition to research on the transition from Web 2.0 Internet to using mobile apps [63,64].
2. Virtual Tourism. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the rapid development of virtual tourism. Tourism Science explored a diverse range of themes in its published articles, such as using grounded theory to investigate the mechanisms of tourist well-being in virtual tourism [65]. Research into virtual tourism’s influencing mechanisms on-site tourism behavior and intentions integrated the technology acceptance model and the American Customer Satisfaction Index with the expectancy theory. Zhao et al. [66] employed questionnaire surveys, difference analyses, and structural equation modeling to validate the impact mechanisms empirically.

Tourism Tribune features articles that focus on the conversion of tourism intentions from virtual to on-site experiences. For example, a study employing structural equation modeling based on the theory of planned behavior explored the mechanism of converting virtual tourism experiences into on-site tourism behavior [67], while another study based on the theory of place attachment introduced the concept of “virtual attachment” to empirically investigate the impact mechanisms of perceived experiential value, virtual attachment, and place attachment on tourists’ on-site tourism intentions when experiencing virtual tourism [68].

Overall, studies have transitioned from focusing on smart tourism to focusing on virtual tourism, such as clarifying the theoretical concepts of both smart tourism and virtual tourism to studying their impact mechanisms. Methodologically, there was a shift from early literature reviews and descriptive analysis to the later predominance of quantitative analyses.

3.7.3. Research Characteristics

Considering the timeline, a fluctuating trend can be seen in the publication volume of both journals. After the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a noticeable increase in virtual tourism-related contents. In 2022, *Tourism Science* reached its peak in terms of the number of articles published on the topic of virtual tourism. Compared with that, the proportion of related articles in *Tourism Science* is relatively higher (Figure 7).

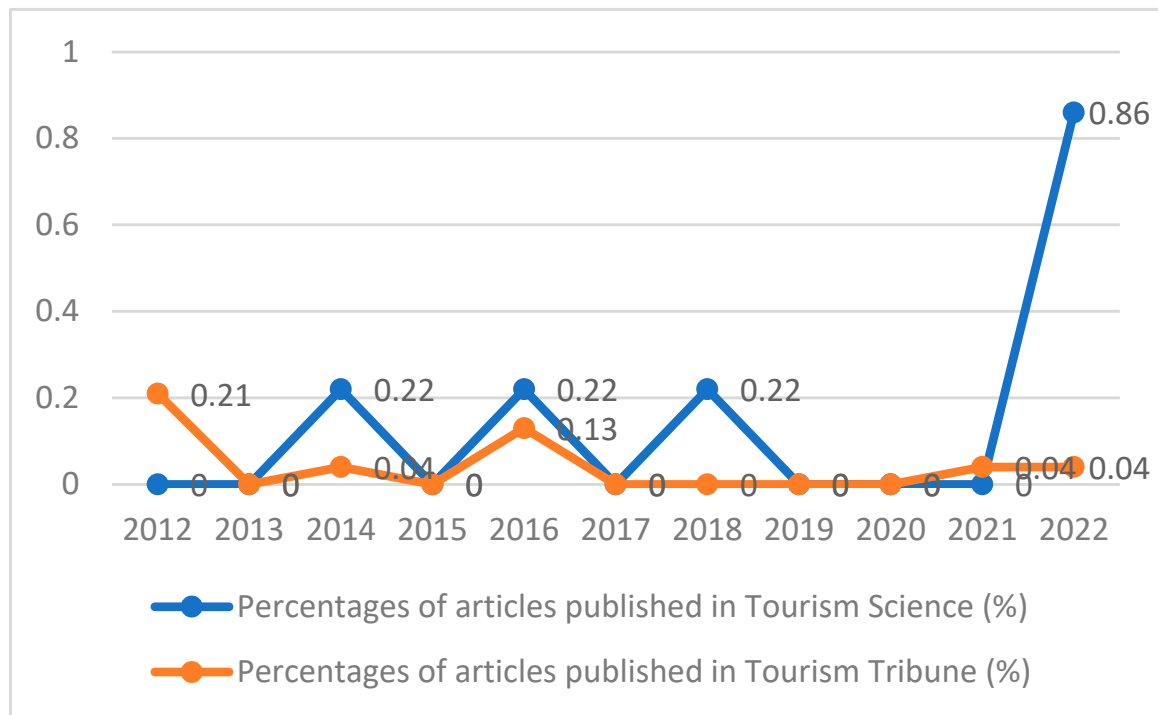


Figure 7. Percentages of smart and virtual tourism articles published in the *Tourism Science* and *Tourism Tribune* in the past decade.

In terms of content, the characteristic of interdisciplinary theoretical integration is displayed, incorporating theories such as embodied experience, self-construction, place attachment, planned behavior, and expectancy. The themes focus on the convenient impact of smart tourism on public services, the mechanisms of generating happiness in virtual tourism and its impact on the conversion to on-site tourism. Studies have transitioned from the early focus on the supply side to the later focus on the demand side, from the initial application of Internet technologies in smart tourism to the later development and application of VR technologies in various tourism segments. In the future, further exploration can be conducted on the synergistic development of virtual and on-site tourism and their multiscene applications.

Furthermore, the two journals have their own emphases in terms of article topics. Tourism economy, wellness tourism, restorative environments, and proenvironmental themes became more prevalent in *Tourism Science*. On the other hand, topics such as the Tourism Law and all-for-one tourism were covered more frequently in the *Tourism Tribune* than in *Tourism Science*.

3.8. Tourism Economy Cluster

3.8.1. Research Background

As one of China's pillar industries supporting economic development, tourism plays a significant role in increasing foreign exchange earnings, generating job opportunities, alleviating poverty, and stimulating regional economies [69,70]. The tourism economy literature covers a wide range of topics and remains consistently important. Hence, *Tourism Science* focuses on the mechanisms underlying the role of tourism and factors contributing to the developmental disparities within the field (Figure 8).

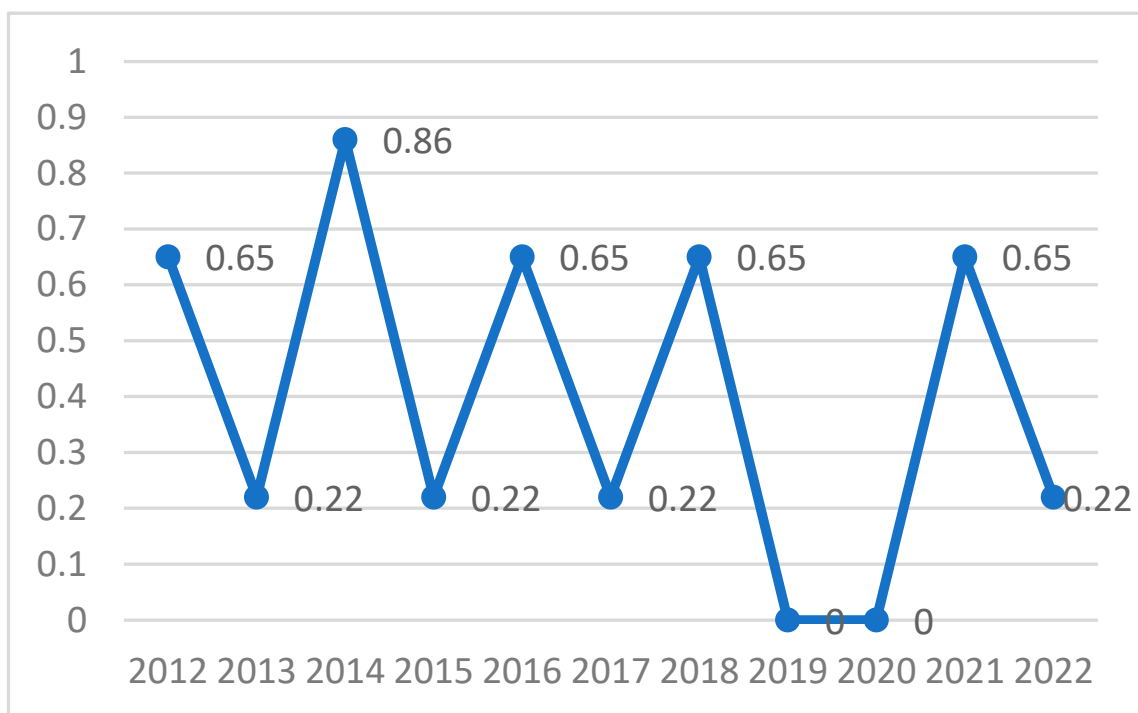


Figure 8. Trend chart for the percentage of tourism economy articles in *Tourism Science* in the past decade.

3.8.2. Research Content

1. Factors and mechanisms influencing the tourism economy. Some scholars have explored this topic qualitatively during the early stages of the literature sample. For example, Zeng and Wu [71] examined the cultural perspectives of cross-cultural tourism studies. Subsequently, quantitative studies were conducted on this topic. For instance, Chen et al. [72] performed a panel data regression analysis to examine the impact of the tourism sector on the growth of the tourism economy at different regional scales. Jiang et al. [73] used the Malmquist Productivity Index data envelopment analysis model to evaluate the influence of smart tourism construction on the high-quality development of the urban tourism economy. Liu et al. [74] employed various methods, such as spatial panel Durbin models, to examine the spatial spillover effects and mechanisms of the Internet's impact on the tourism economy. Research focuses have shifted from qualitative to quantitative approaches with an emphasis on the relationships and mechanisms among influencing factors.

2. Factors influencing spatial disparities in the tourism economy. Chinese scholars have studied the spatial aspect of tourism since the 1980s and many have analyzed the spatial disparities of its impact on the tourism economy. In their quantitative analysis based on the convergence theory, for example, the tourism economy's spatial variation characteristics and its influencing factors in western China was examined. A spatial autocorrelation analysis method was used to investigate the spatial differentiation patterns in the development of the tourism economy in 85 counties (or cities) in the autonomous territory of Xinjiang in northwestern China [75]. All these studies predominantly used quantitative analysis methods.

3.9. Wellness Tourism, Restorative Environments, and Proenvironmental Behavior Clusters

3.9.1. Research Background

In October 2015, the 5th Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee proposed an initiative to promote the construction of a Healthy China and made institutional arrangements to pursue this goal. In January 2016, CNTA issued the Tourism Industry Standards for Demonstration Destination of Health and Wellness Tourism [76] and established the first five national health and wellness tourism demonstration destinations. In July 2016, CNTA and the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine jointly issued the Notice on the Establishment of National Traditional Chinese Medicine Health Tourism Demonstration Zones (Bases/Projects). A series of related policies has greatly promoted the development of wellness tourism and sparked research in related areas, including restorative environments and proenvironmental behaviors.

3.9.2. Research Content

1. Wellness tourism and restorative environments. In 2016, *Tourism Tribune* established a column titled "Tourism and Health Wellness", which analyzed the connotations of wellness tourism and its various forms, such as health tourism, medical tourism, beauty tourism, forest wellness tourism, and the combination of recreational activities with wellness tourism in scenic areas [77,78]. *Tourism Science* also published articles focusing on the impact of tourism activities on tourists' health [79]. Wellness tourism involves concepts of health and restoration; hence, in 2018, *Tourism Science* began to feature articles related to wellness tourism that focused on the impact of restorative environment perspectives [80,81]. The highly central and frequently used keywords in these articles included "tourist health", "environmental restoration", "tourism landscape", "tourism healing", "self-construction", and "revisit intention". Quantitative analyses were primarily used in these studies.
2. Characteristics of research on wellness tourism and restorative environments. Considering their timelines, both journals responded to the introduction of a series of wellness tourism policies in 2015 with related articles. *Tourism Tribune* initially established relevant conversations by writing but later saw a decline in the number of published articles related to this topic. In contrast, *Tourism Science* has consistently published a relatively larger and fluctuating number of articles, with the highest number of articles published in 2021 and 2022 (Figure 9).

Considering the theories used in these published articles, the attention restoration theory was applied widely in the field of wellness tourism. Other commonly applied theories included self-regulation attitudes, emotional evaluation, sensory marketing, and bottom-up spillover. In the early stages of wellness tourism research, there was less focus on tourists' perspectives, with a greater emphasis on the development of related products, such as forest wellness, medical wellness, and beauty wellness. In later stages, however, there was an increasing focus on the impact of wellness tourism on tourists, including how they could experience physical and mental healing in natural environments, relax, alleviate their stress, and restore their energy. As a result, there was a growing emphasis on restorative environments from the perspective of tourists' perceptions in the recent

literature. Future publications could potentially explore different types of wellness tourism resources and restorative environment designs.

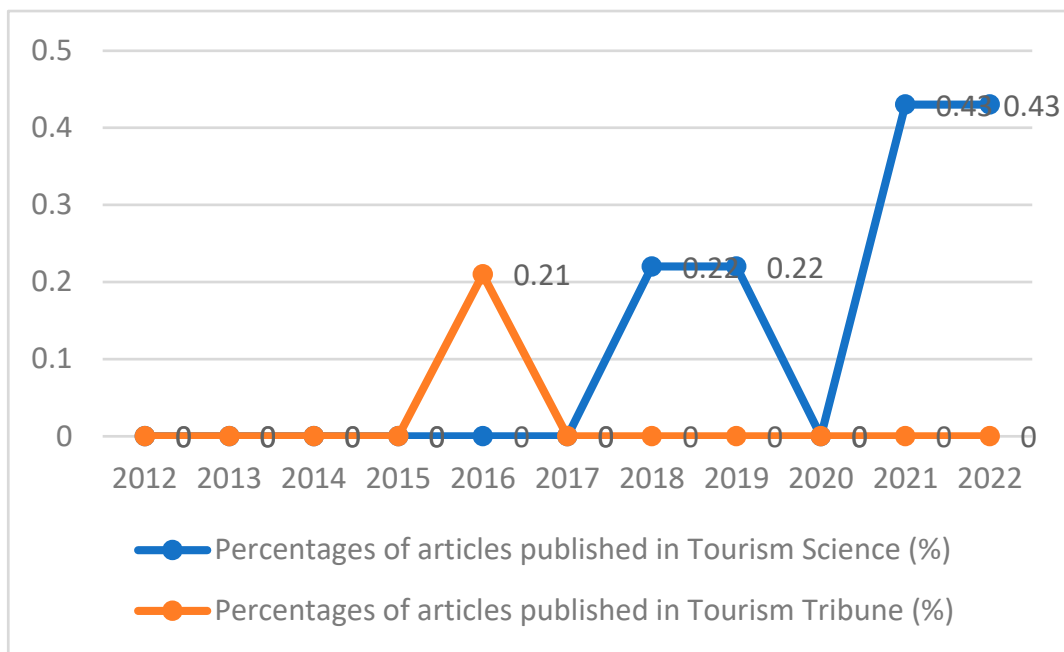


Figure 9. Percentages of wellness tourism and restorative environment articles published in the Tourism Science and Tourism Tribune in the past decade.

3. **Proenvironmental Behavior.** Creating a friendly and rejuvenating environment is crucial for the further development of wellness tourism, with the former being a necessary condition for the latter. In recent years, scholars have shown a high level of interest in this topic, leading to a greater number of relevant articles published in Tourism Science.

In the early stages, many scholars focused on the relationship between tourism and the environment, as well as the impact of tourism on the environment. Examples of these studies include the effects of event tourism on vegetation, the relationship between local environmental characteristics and tourists' sense of place, and the efficiency of tourism in China from an environmental perspective. In the middle and later stages, there was a shift toward examining tourism practitioners and tourists' cognitive attitudes toward the environment. For instance, studies have analyzed the level of environmental awareness among tourism practitioners [82,83] and explored the relationship between tourists' perceived recreational impacts and environmental attitudes. Other studies have also focused on ecological compensation standards and ecological efficiency. In recent years, there was a more direct focus on tourists' proenvironmental or environmentally friendly behavior, environmental conservation behavior, low-carbon behavior, and environmental responsibility behavior [84]. Nevertheless, the proenvironmental behavior literature has been deepening, with increasingly diverse themes and a more pronounced emphasis on quantifiable characteristics.

4. **Characteristics of Research on Proenvironmental Behavior.** Considering the related timeline, relevant articles were already exploring the relationship between tourism and the environment, including its negative impacts, before the Chinese government promoted the concept of wellness tourism in 2015. The literature specifically focused on proenvironmental and environmentally friendly behavior, emerging from 2017 onwards; hence, the volume of articles in this area showed a slight fluctuating decrease (Figure 10).

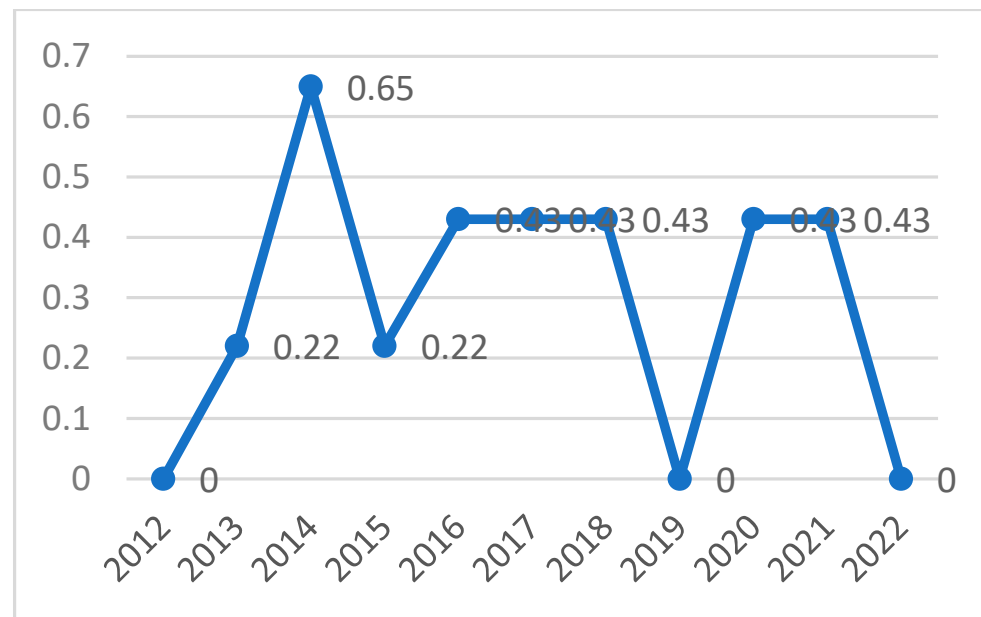


Figure 10. Trend chart for percentage of proenvironmental behavior articles in Tourism Science in the past decade.

Considering the related contents, there was a shift in the value orientation of proenvironmental behavior research. In the early stages of the literature, the focus was more on social practices rather than academic contributions. In the later stages, however, there was a tendency toward theoretical development. Studies have incorporated various theories, such as sense of place, carrying capacity, norms, the “knowledge–attitude–behavior” framework, attribution, and the link between emotions and behavior, into proenvironmental behavior studies. This trend is similar to other cluster studies, with a diverse range of themes and an overall emphasis on the social, ecological, cultural, and ethical aspects of development.

3.10. Tourism Law

3.10.1. Research Background

In 2012, the Tourism Law of the People’s Republic of China (Draft) was submitted for initial review during the 28th meeting of the Standing Committee of the 11th National People’s Congress. In 2013, during the 2nd meeting of the Standing Committee of the 12th National People’s Congress, the Tourism Law of the People’s Republic of China (hereinafter referred to as the “Tourism Law”) was passed by vote. In the same year, China became the third-largest destination for inbound tourism and a major consumer in outbound tourism worldwide. Hence, the world’s largest tourism market was created in China and its tourism sector entered a phase of popularization and industrialization. Therefore, it became necessary to regulate the tourism industry and protect consumers’ rights through the implementation of the Tourism Law [85].

3.10.2. Research Content

Following the promulgation of the Tourism Law, the *Tourism Tribune* featured special topics and conversations by writing related to the new law in both 2012 and 2013, which also extended to other relevant laws and regulations. For example, a detailed explanation and distinction between the civil rights of individuals relative to operators and the state compared with the civil rights of citizens outlined in the Tourism Bill of Rights and Tourist Code was provided. Some suggestions regarding the Regulations on Travel Agencies were made. The system of terminating tourism contracts by combining the Tourism Law with the Contract Law was interpreted systematically. The consideration of issues related to cruise ship dominance within the framework of the Tourism Law was interpreted, and issues

related to tourism contracts were discussed [86]. Research on the Tourism Law continued to be published in 2015 and conversations by writing with the theme of “Research on China’s Outbound Tourism Sector Policies” appeared. For example, the innovation of the tour guide system and policy safeguards were discussed; tourism planning issues were analyzed from a policy-oriented perspective and the safety guarantee system for elderly tourism was a research focus [87]. All these articles primarily involved descriptive and case analyses of the Tourism Law.

3.10.3. Research Characteristics

Considering the timeline, the volume of articles related to the Tourism Law experienced a downward fluctuation over the past decade. In 2012, when the Tourism Law (Draft) was under review, the *Tourism Tribune* featured related columns twice and published a total of 23 articles discussing the topic. After the Tourism Law was adopted in 2013, the *Tourism Tribune* featured one related column and published eight articles. However, the volume of such articles subsequently decreased gradually (Figure 11).

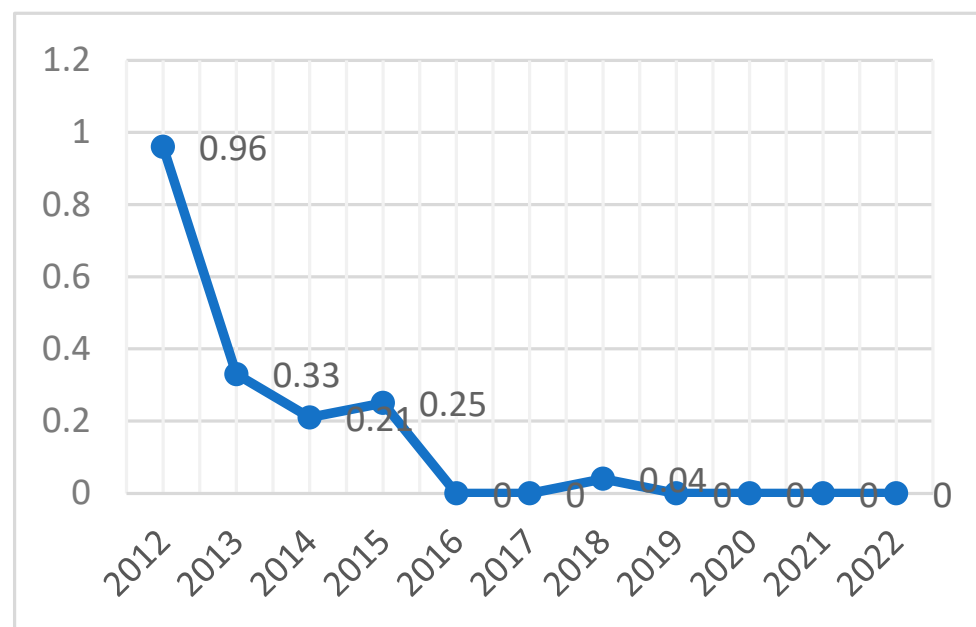


Figure 11. Trend chart for percentages of tourism law articles in Tourism Tribune in the past decade.

Over the past decade, the emphasis of articles with related contents has shifted toward the application and effectiveness of the Tourism Law in practice, rather than academic contributions. The two main reasons for this shift can be summarized as follows: first, the articles published in Tourism Tribune mainly consisted of sketches and notes, such as opinions and suggestions regarding the Tourism Law. Second, following the implementation of the Tourism Law, some regulations have not received full support in the academic or practical spheres. For example, the legislation was intended to address numerous issues that are still unresolved, such as the inclusion of exceptions for shopping. As one of the primary purposes of some tourists, these exceptions have led to the inability to completely eliminate zero-cost group tours. Related issues can be found in various articles, such as Article 111, which pertains to the concept of auxiliary personnel. Similarly, Article 71 deals with the legal application rules for the responsibility of tourism operators toward auxiliary personnel and Article 67 addresses contract termination rights and the unilateral modification rights of travel agencies. These factors have resulted in the ongoing need for practical testing of the Tourism Law. As a consequence, scholars often provide recommendations based on case analyses.

3.11. All-for-One Tourism

3.11.1. Research Background

All-for-one tourism is a planning term that was adopted as a national tourism development model at the National Tourism Work Conference in 2016. In that year, Li Jinzao, head of the CNTA, published an article titled *The Value and Approach of All-for-One Tourism* in the *People's Daily*, which popularized the term and sparked hot discussions in Chinese society. The concept of all-for-one tourism development aligns with the actual development of China's tourism sector at that time. From the perspective of Chinese tourists, there has been a shift from superficial sightseeing to a greater emphasis on immersive experiences leading to increased interactions with various aspects of tourism destinations. From the supply side perspective, tourism is no longer limited to the tourism industry alone but has become a collective effort involving the whole society. Therefore, the concept of all-for-one tourism is in line with the current social background in China [88–90].

3.11.2. Research Content

In 2016, scholars explored the concept and modes of all-for-one tourism development from theoretical perspectives [91]. All-for-one tourism was examined from various perspectives, including information technologies [92], spatial economy, and health and wellness. In 2017, there was a shift toward applying the concept of all-for-one tourism to specific scenarios, such as the application of big data in all-for-one tourism [93,94]. Hence, the related research methods evolved from explanations of theoretical concepts and literature reviews to the use of bibliometrics.

3.11.3. Research Characteristics

Considering the timeline, the overall volume of articles related to all-for-one tourism has experienced a downward trend over the past decade. In 2016, the introduction of the concept of all-for-one tourism led to a significant increase in the number of related articles published in the *Tourism Tribune*, with a peak of 22 articles. However, the volume of such articles has since declined (Figure 12).

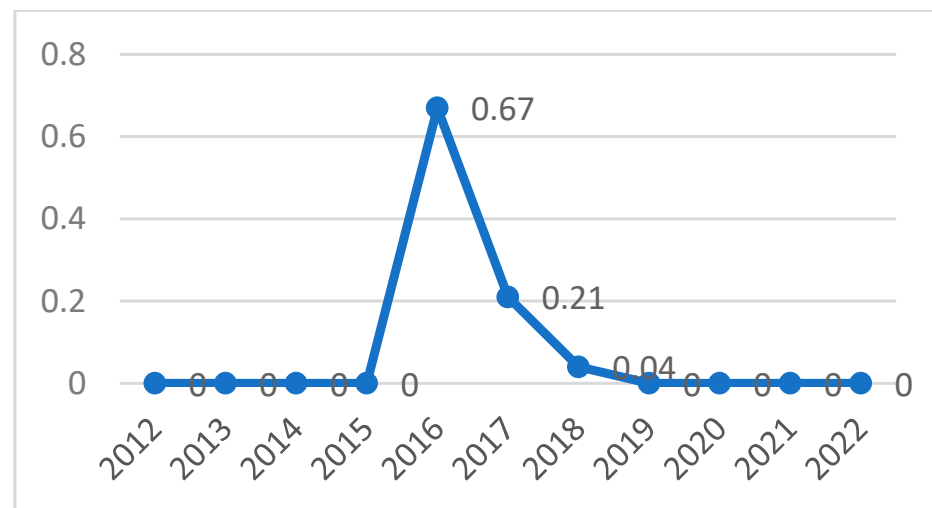


Figure 12. Trend chart for percentages of all-for-one tourism articles in *Tourism Tribune* in the past decade.

In terms of their contents, articles related to all-for-one tourism evolved from the early stages when concepts were clarified and research development reviewed to the analysis stage, which incorporated specific scenarios. In 2016, the establishment of five Wellness Tourism Demonstration Bases and the adoption of all-for-one tourism as a model for tourism development led scholars to focus on wellness tourism from that perspective. However, many of these articles primarily analyzed the current situation, development, and future countermeasures for wellness tourism. Since 2019, scholars have paid less attention

to all-for-one tourism, which may be because this type of tourism product encompasses a wide range of related aspects, including whole-city spaces, public participation, and the integration of tourism with various industries. However, scholars often chose to present global tourism only from a particular perspective, which neglected the elevation of individual regional characteristics into a global commonality. As a result, the volume of articles on this subject decreased owing to their failure to achieve the initial purpose of promulgating all-for-one tourism.

4. Summary, Discussion and Conclusions

4.1. Summary

The topic clusters obtained from CiteSpace are important research branches in the field of tourism. After analyzing the background, content, and characteristics of each cluster, the following trends in tourism research can be summarized as interdisciplinary integration and gradual theoretical deepening, diversified expansion of the field, and evolution in methodologies (Figure 13).

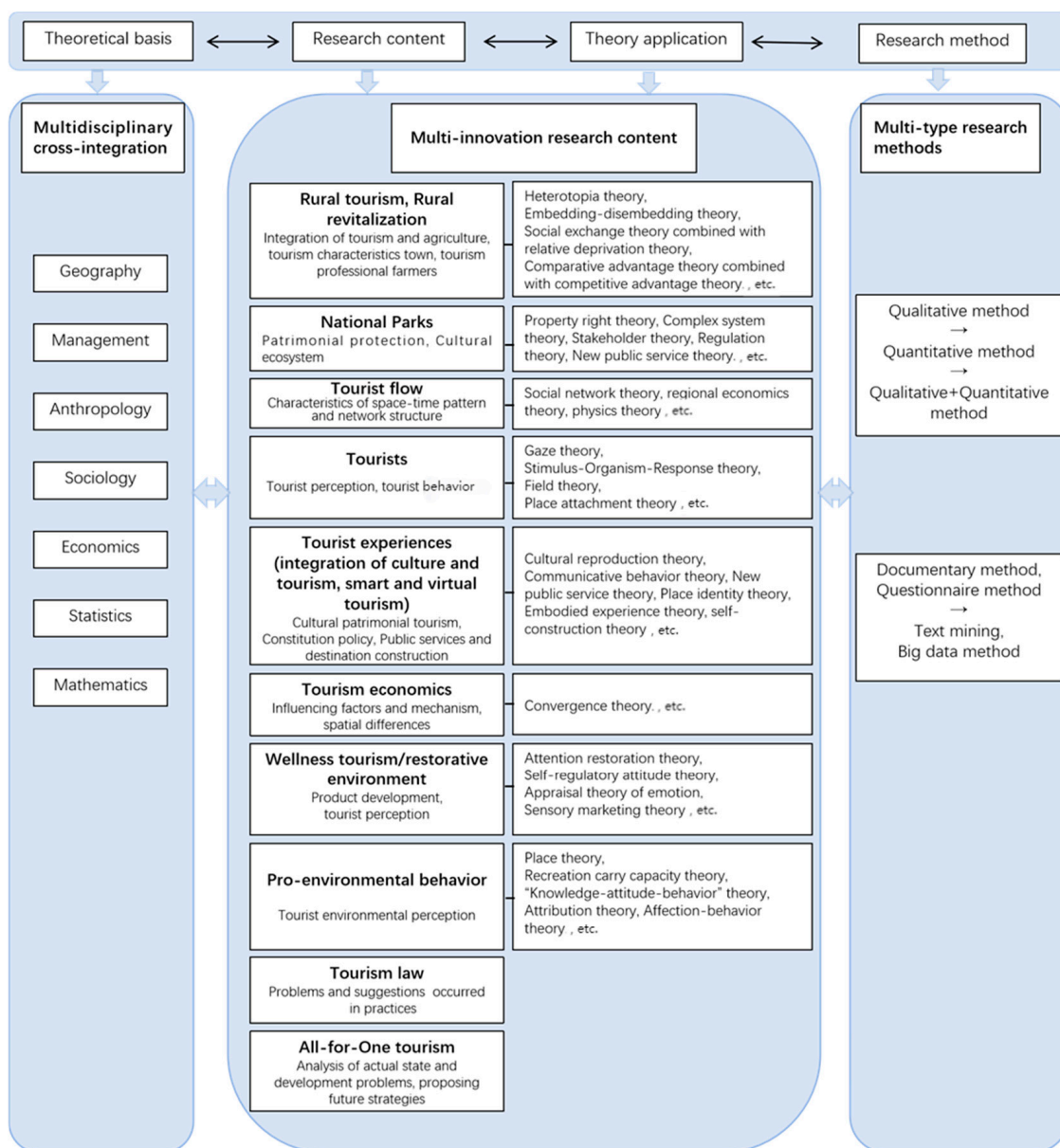


Figure 13. Research framework for Chinese tourism.

4.1.1. Interdisciplinary Integration and Gradual Theoretical Deepening

Tourism research involves interdisciplinary integration of knowledge, with clear intersections among major disciplines, such as geography, management, and anthropology. The resulting research outcomes are naturally diverse. The academic community has focused on the practical aspects of each cluster, followed by reflections on theories, establishing academic norms, and ultimately combining theoretical and applied research to deepen the tourism scholarship.

4.1.2. Diversified Expansion of the Field

The CiteSpace results show that the selected topics in the two journals have been diverse in the past decade. The hot topics included rural tourism and revitalization, national parks and ecosystem services, tourism flows (e.g., spatiotemporal patterns and network structure characteristics), tourist perceptions and behaviors, tourism experiences (e.g., integration of culture and tourism, smart tourism, and virtual tourism), tourism economy, wellness tourism and restorative environments, proenvironmental behavior, the Tourism Law, and all-for-one tourism. Among them, the volume of articles related to the following key research topics of the past 5 years, that is, rural tourism, national parks, the integration of culture and tourism, smart tourism, and virtual tourism, has shown an overall increasing trend. These clusters represent recent research hotspots.

4.1.3. Evolution in Methodologies

The methodologies used in the tourism literature have evolved from qualitative concept clarification to combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, including the construction of relational models and analysis. For example, “grounded theory” emerged as a prominent keyword in 2014, which was often used to describe “phenomena that are not well understood or concepts that are not fully developed” [95,96]. Hence, the research in the two journals often focused on emerging fields. Keyword meta-analysis emerged in 2019 and 2020, which reflected a shift from macro-level literature reviews to more micro-level analysis. In addition, comprehensive data analyses have been integrated into the literature following a shift from using questionnaire surveys to the increased use of Web crawling and big data in recent years.

4.2. Discussion and Conclusions

In conjunction with the results of a Delphi survey conducted among the journals’ editorial board members after the quantitative analysis (Appendix A), this section will specifically discuss the research bottlenecks and corresponding measures, as well as research visions and prospects.

4.2.1. Research Bottlenecks and Corresponding Measures

Based on the journals’ editorial board members’ responses to question 1 question 2 and question 3 in Appendix A and the article’s review of the research hotspots in China’s tourism research in the past decade, the challenges and corresponding measures in China’s tourism research is summarized as follows.

1. **Theoretical Level.** Theoretical research in Chinese tourism studies is often lacking in originality, with a heavy reliance on foreign and other disciplinary theories. The discipline’s boundaries are also blurry and there is a lack of capability in synthesizing and conceptualizing localized theories, which makes it difficult to strike a balance between “localization” and “internationalization” in theoretical research. The applicability of theories is often inconsistent across studies, which limits the innovative and knowledge-contributing aspects of the research literature. As a result, tourism theories using knowledge spillover have yet to emerge in the literature. Some studies were disconnected from their practical applications and overly focused on stylization, formalization, and standardization, leading to a tendency for “academic technical-

ization” and a prioritization of methodology over substance, which often results in research conclusions that merely restate common knowledge.

In summary, it is important to both keep up with the forefront of international tourism academia and actively draw inspiration from the tourism literature while also grounding tourism research in the Chinese context. Hence, Chinese tourism studies should be guided by national strategies and development needs that focus on leading-edge science, explore the unique theoretical underpinnings of tourism in China, promote its localization, and foster innovation to achieve theoretical originality.

2. **Practical Applications.** The choice of research topics in the tourism field is somewhat limited, as studies lack problem awareness, problem identification skills, and breakthrough perspectives. Some theoretical studies lack practical foundations and real-world support. In addition, research efforts are primarily concentrated in universities and research institutes, with weak practical experience and disconnection between academic research and real-world economic and management issues. Finally, there is an insufficient focus on practical and industry development-oriented policy contributions, as well as research topics and outcomes aligned with national strategic priorities.

Therefore, it is necessary to enhance the collaboration between academia and the tourism industry through university–enterprise partnerships to create a more robust training mechanism for university teachers that involves collaborations between government, academia, service industries, and mentors. These collaborations will ensure the integration of theory with practice, enhance the practical implications of academic achievements, and facilitate the discovery of new theories through the identification of patterns.

4.2.2. Future Tourism Research Agenda

In conjunction with the results of the Delphi survey conducted among the journals’ editorial board members (Appendix A), Chinese tourism research could carry out more in-depth research from the following aspects:

1. **Tourism Research for Well-Being and Equity.** As a manifestation of explicit spiritual consumption, the happiness effect of tourism is becoming increasingly prominent. Western research on well-being encompasses a broad range of topics. For example, discussions have taken place on hedonia and eudaimonia [97], and scales measuring well-being [98], the well-being of elderly tourists [99], and resilience in tourism during COVID-19 [100]. In the Chinese academic context, research on tourism well-being constitutes a relatively small proportion of tourism studies. The relevant literature predominantly explores tourism well-being from the perspectives of subjective well-being, restorative tourism, and pro-environmental tourism. In the future, Chinese scholars should consider exploring tourist well-being from the perspectives of eudaimonia and the well-being of the elderly. In the current context of the integration of culture and tourism in China, tourism’s social significance is expanding and its philanthropic attributes are being recognized [61]. In response to common prosperity and the well-being of all citizens, future research should establish a tourism development perspective that prioritizes safeguarding citizens’ rights and interests and eliminating inequality. This perspective should focus on the contribution of tourism development to social benefits and well-being by addressing poverty alleviation through tourism, spatial justice, and supporting rural revitalization, as well as the physical and mental health and happiness of tourists, residents in tourist destinations, and employees of tourism enterprises.
2. **Advancing Multidimensional Research on Sustainable Tourism Development.** In recent years, the sustainability of the tourism sector and its associated research has faced new challenges and opportunities owing to the evolving international landscapes, network security, the COVID-19 pandemic, abnormal weather patterns, China’s dual carbon goals, and the vision of a Healthy China. In recent years, Western scholars have begun to analyze tourism’s contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs), striving to achieve sustainable tourism development from the perspective of the SDGs [101,102]. For instance, Sharpley [102] analyzed the sustainable goals related to tourism from the perspectives of tourist destinations, hosts, and tourists, urging future research to explore how tourism can contribute to the SDG 2030 targets. Rasoolimanesh et al. [103] investigated the relationship between sustainable tourism indicators and the SDGs, discovering that residents are the most engaged stakeholders in sustainable tourism development, whereas tourists are the least engaged. There has been a very limited number of academic articles directly addressing sustainable tourism development in China compared to the Western academic community. Most Chinese research is indirectly related to sustainable development. Future Chinese tourism research should consider how to achieve sustainable development and how to meet the SDG 2030 targets. Moreover, future research must shift from the traditional approach of assessing the tourism environment and proposing strategies from a tourism producer's perspective. Scholars should focus on the sustainability of tourism production and resource use, while also exploring the perspective of tourists to emphasize the sustainability of their consumption, responsible environmental practices, and underlying driving mechanisms. Furthermore, researchers should address the environmental effects of tourism, the interrelationships between tourism and climate change, carbon neutrality, and the integration of tourism with innovation.

3. Collaboration and coexistence of tourism and technology in the digital era. Western scholars have analyzed the role of digital marketing in tourism from the perspectives of tourism marketers and tourists. It has been demonstrated that the increased adoption of digital marketing tools (augmented reality, virtual reality, mixed reality, metaverse, and artificial intelligence) has disrupted the status quo of the tourism industry [104,105]. Chinese scholars still lack research on the application and impact of the Metaverse and AI in tourism. Combined with the general background of China's cultural and tourism integration needs, future research should focus on the emergence of new drivers for tourism development in China through technological innovation and digital transformation. Scholars should examine the collaboration and coexistence between technology transformation and the development of culture and tourism, and explore the behavioral patterns and characteristics of tourists in the digital era. The tourism literature should pay attention to new applications of the integration of technology, culture, and tourism represented by virtual tourism, artificial intelligence, cultural tourism metaverse, and digital twins among the new tourism formats driven by digital technologies. This study will contribute to the creation of new experiences in tourism services and consumption by promoting personalized, high-quality, and intelligent development of the tourism sector and facilitating the high-quality development of the tourism economy [106].

Compared with foreign research, we have observed that numerous foreign scholars believe that future tourism research can be explored from the following aspects: forecasting (forecasting tourism demand amid major public health crises), information technology, quality of life, sustainable behavior and environmental sustainability, rural tourism, and poverty [107–109]. Compared with the future tourism research agenda for Chinese tourism scholars, we can observe that both Chinese and Western scholars emphasize the need for research on sustainable tourism development in the digital era. Western scholars hope for further advancements in areas such as forecasting, rural tourism, and poverty studies, while Chinese scholars have higher expectations for more in-depth research on human wellbeing.

4.2.3. Conclusions and Limitations

The existing literature lacks comprehensive reviews focused on tourism research in the unique context of China. Moreover, a systematic analysis of the literature reviews on Chinese tourism research, covering the research background, content, methodology, and characteristics of each research hotspot, is still absent. This study employed Citespace visual analysis and Delphi surveys to identify the hotspots in Chinese tourism research,

observe changes in these hotspots before and after the pandemic, and analyze how the research methods and content of each hotspot have evolved over time. These findings provide both Chinese and Western tourism scholars with a systematic understanding of the development of the Chinese tourism academia over the past decade. The recommendations for future research topics in Chinese tourism discussed in this study offer valuable insights for scholars and enhance Western scholars' understanding of Chinese tourism research.

This study has some limitations. The results of the study are based on two of the most renowned tourism academic journals in China. There are other tourism-related journals in China, which, although covering a broader range of fields, also contain a significant number of tourism-related papers. Therefore, this study has some limitations in terms of sample size. Additionally, this study was based on the keywords of academic papers. However, some research findings may not be fully captured by keywords alone, potentially affecting the results. Future reviews of tourism research could use the full content of papers as a corpus, employing text topic modeling and text mining techniques to extract keywords. This approach would yield more precise and comprehensive keywords.

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Appendix A. Delphi Open-Ended Questions Round 1

Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4
What are currently the main problems and challenges for Chinese tourism research?	What actions do you think can be taken to address the problems and deficiencies in China tourism research?	Which departments, institutions or communities do you think should participate in promoting the development and reform of Chinese tourism research?	What problems and challenges should Chinese tourism research be addressing by 2030?

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