

Digital Pathways of Cultural Soft Power: How Daoist thought Participates in Global Competition within the Digital Art Industry

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The digital art industry has become an important arena for cultural competition. This study explores how Daoist thought can function as an operational cultural logic within global digital art industries and proposes the concept of digital pathways of cultural soft power. Using a conceptual analytical approach, it examines three dimensions of Daoist thought—generativity (ziran), non-instrumentality (wu-wei), and non-anthropocentrism (wuhua)—across four illustrative cases of internationally recognized digital art practice, and develops a three-layer framework linking cultural logic, production, platform mediation and market positioning. The findings suggest that Daoist thought can contribute to aesthetic differentiation by shaping creative processes, authorship models and experiential strategies, but that these pathways are conditional on platform structures, audience cultural literacy and institutional mediation, while facing risks of aesthetic simplification and commercial instrumentalization. By shifting analysis from symbolic representation to productive cultural logic, the study contributes to research on digital cultural industries, creative economy innovation and the global circulation of non-Western cultural traditions.

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1. Introduction

1.1 The digital art industry as a site of cultural competition

The global digital art industry has expanded rapidly, driven by advances in artificial intelligence, blockchain technologies and immersive media (Whitaker & Kraussl, 2020; Franceschet et al., 2021; Nadini et al., 2021), and creative services are increasingly recognized in policy as a driver of industrial innovation rather than a residual cultural sector (UNCTAD, 2022). The sector has become a critical arena of cultural competition, in which aesthetic differentiation co-determines market positioning alongside technological innovation. Yet scholarship remains focused on technology and market dynamics, overlooking how cultural logics function as competitive resources.

1.2 Research gap: from representation to production

Research on cultural soft power has predominantly examined how states construct national images through media, language and cultural diplomacy (Nye, 1990, 2004, 2008; Rawnsley, 2012), while cultural industry studies have centred on the political economy of platforms (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Poell et al., 2022), the organization of cultural production (Hesmondhalgh, 2019) and the globalization of creative economies (Flew, 2013; Keane, 2013). An analytical gap persists: how do non-Western philosophical traditions operate not as symbols for representation, but as logics organizing technological design, industrial mechanisms and aesthetic positioning?

The gap can be stated as a contrast between two causal chains. Conventionally, soft power runs from culture to representation to attraction: a tradition is encoded in exportable content, that content circulates, and attraction follows. In platformized digital art the chain differs. Culture enters as a production logic inscribed in tools, algorithms and workflows; the resulting works are mediated by platform curation; visibility feeds valuation and legitimation; and only then does influence accrue. Cultural difference is

instantiated in method rather than transmitted as message, which is why the digital art industry is the strategic scene for this argument.

This gap is particularly salient in the digital art industry, where generative art, AI art and immersive experiences challenge Western-centric aesthetic paradigms centred on authorial control and anthropocentric creation (Manovich, 2018; Paul, 2015; Groys, 2016).

1.3 Research questions

Accordingly, this paper addresses three research questions:

RQ1. How can non-Western philosophical traditions operate as productive cultural logics, rather than representational content, in digital creative industries?

RQ2. Through what mechanisms do such cultural logics influence digital art production, platform mediation and market valuation?

RQ3. What opportunities and constraints, and under what boundary conditions, shape their global competitiveness?

1.4 Research objective and scope

This paper proposes the concept of digital pathways of cultural soft power to theorize how Daoist thought participates in global competition within the digital art industry. Rather than treating Daoist philosophy as heritage to be preserved or a symbol to be exported, it examines Daoism as an operational logic embedded in production, platform mechanisms and market positioning. It does not evaluate state-led cultural strategies, nor claim that Daoist thought is intentionally mobilized by policy actors.

The argument also carries a development dimension. Sustainable Development Goal 9, on industry, innovation and infrastructure, calls for inclusive and sustainable industrialization and for upgrading technological capabilities, and creative industries are explicitly positioned within this agenda (UNCTAD, 2022). Understanding cultural logics as inputs to production rather than decorative content clarifies how culturally diverse

innovation capacity can be built into the infrastructures of the creative economy.

2. Theoretical Foundations

2.1 From cultural soft power to industrial competition

Soft power, as articulated by Nye (1990, 2004), refers to the capacity to shape preferences through attraction rather than coercion, and subsequent scholarship has extended the concept to cultural industries as vehicles for projecting national values (Iwabuchi, 2002; Keane, 2013).

Existing frameworks nevertheless share two limitations: they conceptualize culture as representational content to be disseminated rather than as operational logic shaping industrial processes, and they focus on distribution and

reception while neglecting how cultural logics are embedded in production systems and technological infrastructures (Hesmondhalgh, 2019).

2.1.1 From representational soft power to productive soft power

This paper distinguishes two modes of cultural soft power. Representational soft power operates through the circulation of cultural symbols: its unit of analysis is the message, its measure perception. Productive soft power operates through the entry of cultural logic into production systems: its unit is the method, its measure the competitive position that method secures. The distinction is analytical rather than exclusive (Table 1).

Table 1. Representational and productive modes of cultural soft power.

Dimension	Representational soft power	Productive soft power
Core mechanism	Circulation of symbols, narratives and images	Embedding of cultural logic in production systems and technological design
Locus of culture	Content and message	Method, workflow, algorithm and authorship model
Unit of analysis	National image; cultural products	Production logic; platform mediation; valuation regime
Route to influence	Attraction through representation	Differentiation through industrial competitiveness
Typical evidence	Audience perception, media coverage, diplomacy outcomes	Platform visibility, valuation criteria, institutional uptake
Principal vulnerability	Political framing and credibility deficits	Platform instrumentalization and aesthetic flattening

The reconceptualization of soft power as a productive rather than representational process constitutes the first theoretical contribution of this paper, and it frames the remainder of the analysis.

2.2 Digital cultural industries and platform logic

Platformization has transformed how cultural goods are produced, circulated and valued

(Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Poell et al., 2022; Srnicek, 2017). Four dynamics are particularly salient for digital art.

Algorithmic curation and valuation. Recommendation systems shape visibility, discoverability and market value by privileging certain aesthetic features, constructing taste hierarchies through data-driven curation (Bucher, 2018; Gillespie, 2014; Striplhas, 2015; Tedone, 2019). In digital art markets this intersects with

human curatorial authority to produce hybrid valuation regimes in which platform visibility directly shapes economic value (Whitaker & Kraussl, 2020).

NFT markets and new value infrastructures. Blockchain-based art markets introduced mechanisms for authentication, scarcity production and speculative valuation grounded in verifiable provenance and collector network effects (Franceschet et al., 2021; Nadini et al., 2021; Vasan et al., 2022). Though the market has contracted, these innovations continue to shape platform design and collector expectations.

AI art and authorship disputes. Generative systems have intensified debates over authorship and aesthetic value, revealing tensions between humanist conceptions of creativity and machinic production (Boden, 2004; Colton & Wiggins, 2012; Epstein et al., 2023; Hong & Curran, 2019; Manovich, 2018). These debates open discursive space for frameworks of creation that do not centre human intentionality.

Immersive and attention-driven experience economies. Large-scale immersive art constitutes a growing segment in which aesthetic differentiation drives positioning (Lawhead, 2023; Pine & Gilmore, 2011), yet analyses of branded immersive exhibitions show the experience economy converging with an attention economy in which spectacle and shareability become the operative measures of value (Mondloch, 2022). Evidence from Southeast Asian platform markets indicates that real-time environments generate flow states translating into impulsive consumption (Paraman et al., 2022).

These developments create conditions under which cultural logics can become competitive resources: not as static symbols, but as dynamic principles shaping production, visibility and differentiation.

2.3 Daoist thought as cultural logic: three analytically distinct dimensions

Classical Daoist texts, particularly the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*, articulate an ontological and aesthetic worldview differing from post-

Enlightenment aesthetics centred on authorial intentionality, teleological design and humanist subjectivity. This paper operationalizes Daoist thought through three dimensions, distinguished by their focal domains of process, action and subject.

Dimension 1: Generativity (ziran, process logic). Generativity refers to spontaneous emergence and self-organizing processes in creation. Drawing on *ziran* as self-so-ness, it holds that authentic creation arises through becoming rather than making (Ames & Hall, 2003). Its focus is how things come into being: non-linear, recursive and open-ended processes whose outcomes are not predetermined. Industrial manifestation: generative algorithms, AI co-creation and procedural art systems.

Dimension 2: Non-instrumentality (wu-wei, action logic). Grounded in *wu-wei* or non-forcing action, non-instrumentality refers to modes of action resisting teleological optimization. Its focus is how agents act: through responsiveness rather than goal maximization (Slingerland, 2003). Where generativity concerns process structure, non-instrumentality concerns the stance of action. Industrial manifestation: strategies prioritizing subtlety over spectacle and depth over attention capture.

Dimension 3: Non-anthropocentrism (wuhua, subject logic). Non-anthropocentrism decentres human agency as the origin of meaning, value and authorship, situating human actors within ecologies of relation, what the *Zhuangzi* calls the transformations of things (Callicott & Ames, 1989). Its focus is who or what counts as an agent: distributed and relational rather than individualist. Industrial manifestation: posthuman aesthetics, ecological art and human-machine co-authorship.

2.3.1 Distinguishing Daoist logic from adjacent Western frameworks

Each dimension has a familiar Western counterpart: generativity resembles emergence and complexity theory, non-instrumentality resembles critiques of optimization, and non-anthropocentrism resembles posthumanism and

new materialism (Braidotti, 2019; Haraway, 2016). Why, then, a Daoist vocabulary?

Not because Daoist thought is uniquely suited to digital art or supersedes these frameworks, but

because it supplies an alternative genealogy: it reaches comparable positions from different premises, and therefore foregrounds what those frameworks leave in the background (Table 2).

Table 2. Daoist dimensions and adjacent Western frameworks: an alternative genealogy, not a substitution.

Daoist dimension	Closest Western framework	What framework that foregrounds	Distinctive Daoist emphasis
Generativity (ziran)	Emergence and complexity theory	System-level order arising from local interaction	Relational becoming. Emergence is normative as well as descriptive: what is self-so carries aesthetic authority, and the designer withdraws by principle rather than by technical limitation.
Non-instrumentality (wu-wei)	Anti-optimization and slow media critique	Negative critique of metrics, acceleration and efficiency	Action without forcing. Efficacy comes through responsiveness and non-contention (bu zheng); an affirmative ethic of effective action, not a refusal of action.
Non-anthropocentrism (wuhua)	Posthumanism and new materialism	Decentring of the human subject as a critique following humanism	Cosmological relationality. The human was never the centre; the continuity of transformation among things is prior to, rather than a correction of, humanist subjectivity.

Analytically, the Daoist vocabulary makes visible the normative and cosmological dimensions of processual aesthetics that emergence theory brackets; industrially, it carries a culturally specific resonance in markets seeking non-Western aesthetic resources, itself a condition of differentiation. The three dimensions are analytically distinct yet operationally interconnected.

3. Analytical Framework and Research Approach

3.1 Research design

This study adopts a conceptual and analytical design combining cultural industry analysis with conceptual interpretation, anchored in purposively selected illustrative cases. It is not

empirical and does not measure reception, market share or price effects; its purpose is to specify mechanisms and boundary conditions that subsequent empirical work can test.

The research object is characterized by high abstraction, platform heterogeneity and rapid technological change, conditions under which isolated quantitative indicators cannot capture underlying cultural logics. The study therefore focuses on recurring structural patterns and industrial mechanisms, treating cases as interpretive anchors rather than evidence of causal influence.

3.2 Conceptual operationalization

The paper operationalizes Daoist thought through the three dimensions introduced in

Section 2.3 — generativity as process logic, non-instrumentality as action logic, non-anthropocentrism as subject logic — examined as functional logics manifested in production, platform mediation and market positioning rather than as textual meanings.

Operationalizing competition. Competition is examined through three observable proxies rather than market share alone: platform visibility, comprising curation, recommendation and discoverability; valuation regimes, comprising pricing, scarcity production and

legitimation; and institutional uptake, comprising exhibitions, acquisitions and curatorial framing.

3.3 Multi-layer analytical framework

The analysis proceeds through a three-layer framework. Layer 1 concerns production logic, where cultural logic is inscribed in tools, workflows and authorship models. Layer 2 concerns platform mediation, where works are made visible, searchable and priceable. Layer 3 concerns market positioning, where visibility becomes differentiation, legitimation and collector demand.

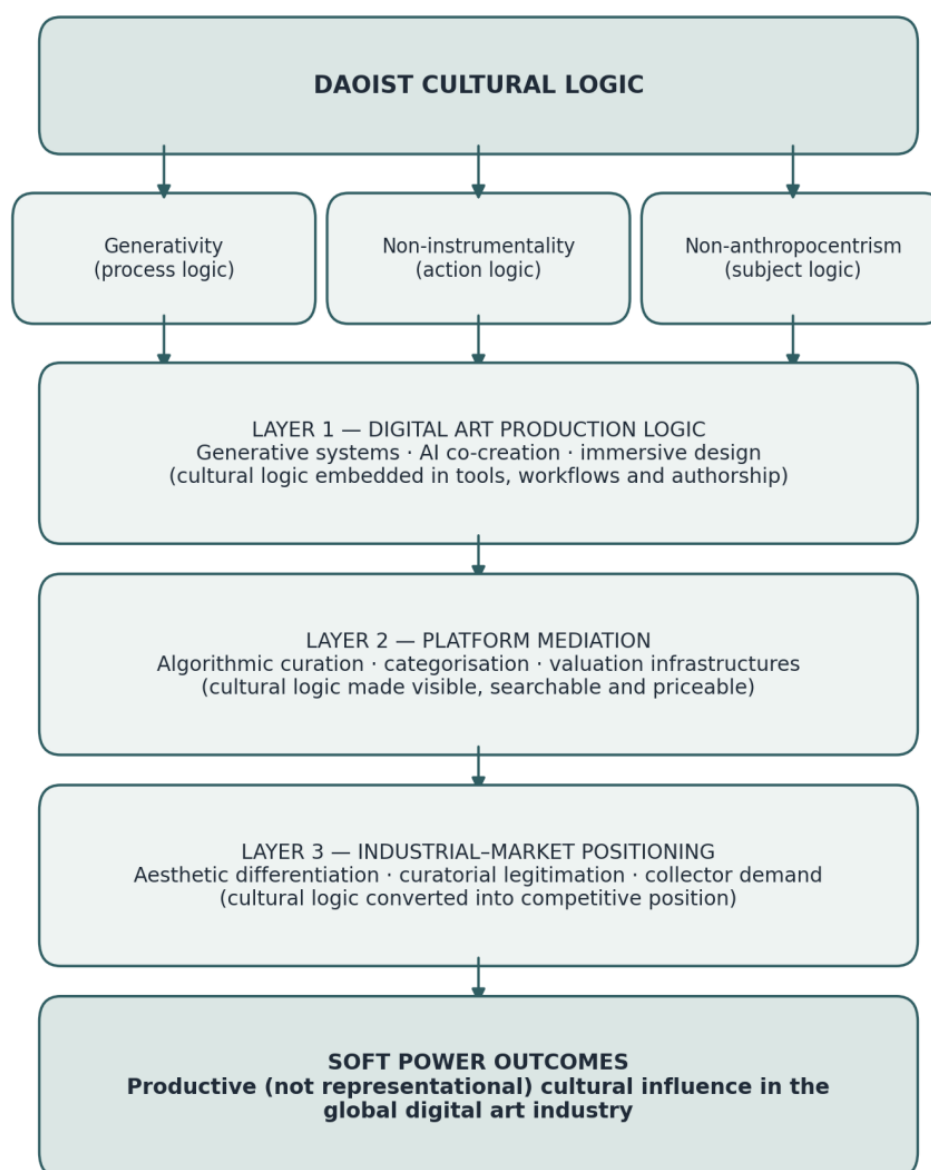


Figure 1. Theoretical model: Daoist cultural logic as a productive pathway of cultural soft power.

Figure 1 states the vertical logic, how a cultural logic descends into an industrial system; Figure 2 in Section 4.2 states the horizontal logic, how the resulting difference becomes a competitive position.

3.4 Case selection logic and illustrative cases

The study applies explicit selection criteria. Cases were included where they satisfied all four of the following conditions:

- the practice is internationally recognized, with verifiable presence in major institutions, biennials or established digital art platforms;
- production involves algorithmic, generative, computational or immersive technologies, so that production logic is technologically inscribed rather than merely stylistic;

- the practice demonstrates cultural translation, circulating across at least two distinct market or institutional contexts;
- documentation is publicly available, so that production logic, curatorial framing and valuation can be examined without privileged access.

Four cases satisfying these criteria are used throughout, spanning the three Daoist dimensions and the principal platform types identified in Section 2.2. Two clarifications are essential. First, with the partial exception of Yang Yongliang, none of these practitioners claims Daoist inspiration; the cases are read through the framework rather than offered as evidence that it caused them. Second, they are selected for analytical variation, not representativeness.

Table 3. Illustrative cases, selection domains and observed industrial mechanisms.

Case	Technology and form	Daoist logic foregrounded	Industrial mechanism observed
Refik Anadol Studio, Unsupervised (MoMA, New York, 198-211)	AI data art; generative adversarial networks trained on an institutional archive	Generativity (process logic)	Process-based valuation; institutional acquisition of a continuously self-generating work
Long-form generative art platforms (Art Blocks, fxhash)	On-chain generative algorithms; parameter spaces released as programmable editions	Generativity (process logic)	Process authenticity and programmatic scarcity as the basis of pricing and provenance
teamLab immersive installations (e.g. teamLab: Continuity, Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, 198-211)	Sensor-based interactive projection; responsive digital ecosystems	Non-instrumentality (action logic); non-anthropocentrism (subject logic)	Experience economy with curated legitimacy; duration and contemplation as differentiators
Yang Yongliang, digital shan-shui moving-image works	Digital compositing, photographic assemblage and video; landscape recomposed from urban imagery	Non-anthropocentrism (subject logic); generativity	Cultural positioning through institutional collection and cross-market curatorial framing

3.5 Limitations of the approach

Its contribution lies in conceptual clarification and mechanism modelling that can inform comparative case studies, platform data analysis and reception studies. A further limitation is interpretive: because the framework is applied to practices that do not describe themselves in Daoist terms, it establishes interpretive fit rather than demonstrated influence.

4. Daoist Thought and Its Digital Pathways in Global Digital Art Competition

4.1 Aesthetic strategies of Daoist logic in digital art production

Competition in the global digital art industry is not reducible to technological sophistication. As the market saturates with technically impressive works, aesthetic differentiation becomes a critical axis of competition, and this section examines how Daoist thought supplies logics aligned with emerging digital art forms.

Generativity and algorithmic art. Generative and AI-assisted creation unsettle post-Enlightenment assumptions about the autonomous artist exercising intentional control, foregrounding emergence and process. Where dominant frameworks struggle to locate authorship in generative systems, *ziran* offers resources for valorizing processual and non-intentional creation as an alternative mode of aesthetic production rather than a diminishment of agency (Manovich, 2018).

Case anchor 1: generative practice and institutional acquisition. In Refik Anadol Studio's *Unsupervised*, a machine-learning model trained on a museum archive generates imagery continuously and without a fixed final state (Museum of Modern Art, 2022). On long-form generative platforms such as Art Blocks, artists design parameter spaces while relinquishing control over outputs, and value attaches to emergent system properties. The artist establishes conditions for emergence rather than imposing form. The claim is interpretive rather than genetic, and such works can be positioned as philosophically coherent rather than merely technically novel.

Non-instrumentality and anti-optimization aesthetics. The principle of *wu-wei* offers an alternative to the instrumental rationality dominating digital production, and particularly to the attention-optimization logic of platform ecosystems, emphasizing responsiveness to emergent conditions over the maximization of engagement metrics.

Case anchor 2: two logics of immersive design. Contrast experiences designed for maximum stimulation and shareability, analysed as instruments of an attention-experience economy (Mondloch, 2022), with those emphasizing slowness and open-ended attention. teamLab's responsive ecosystems illustrate the second orientation: visitors are invited into open-ended experiential states within an environment that continues to change without them (Lawhead, 2023). In a market saturated with spectacle, such orientation differentiates.

4.2 Platform and market mediation

Digital art circulates through platforms that shape what becomes visible, valuable and marketable, organizing works through algorithmic curation and categorization that necessarily construct aesthetic differences (Bucher, 2018; Carah, 2017). Daoist-informed works thereby become legible as markers of Eastern aesthetic difference, which both aids positioning and discovery and risks reducing an operational logic to a visual style.

Case anchor 3: platform typology and aesthetic mediation. The same Daoist-informed generative work is valued differently across contexts. On curated institutional platforms, valuation emphasizes curatorial legitimation and critical discourse, and Daoist thought functions as philosophical grounding elevating work from digital novelty to significant practice. On NFT marketplaces, valuation emphasizes scarcity and reputation, and Daoist aesthetics may be flattened into visual markers functioning as genre signals. On social-algorithmic platforms, attention metrics dominate and slow-reveal aesthetics face structural disadvantage (Paraman et al., 2022).

Market positioning and non-contention. Rather than competing with established Western institutions on their own terms, Daoist-informed digital art can pursue adaptive positioning, occupying niches aligned with ecological awareness, posthuman perspectives and process-based art. This resonates with *bu zheng*, non-

contention: advantage sought through differentiation rather than confrontation. Yang Yongliang's digital *shan-shui* works illustrate the pattern, entering Western collections through the category of landscape while advancing a non-anthropocentric account of city, nature and viewer.

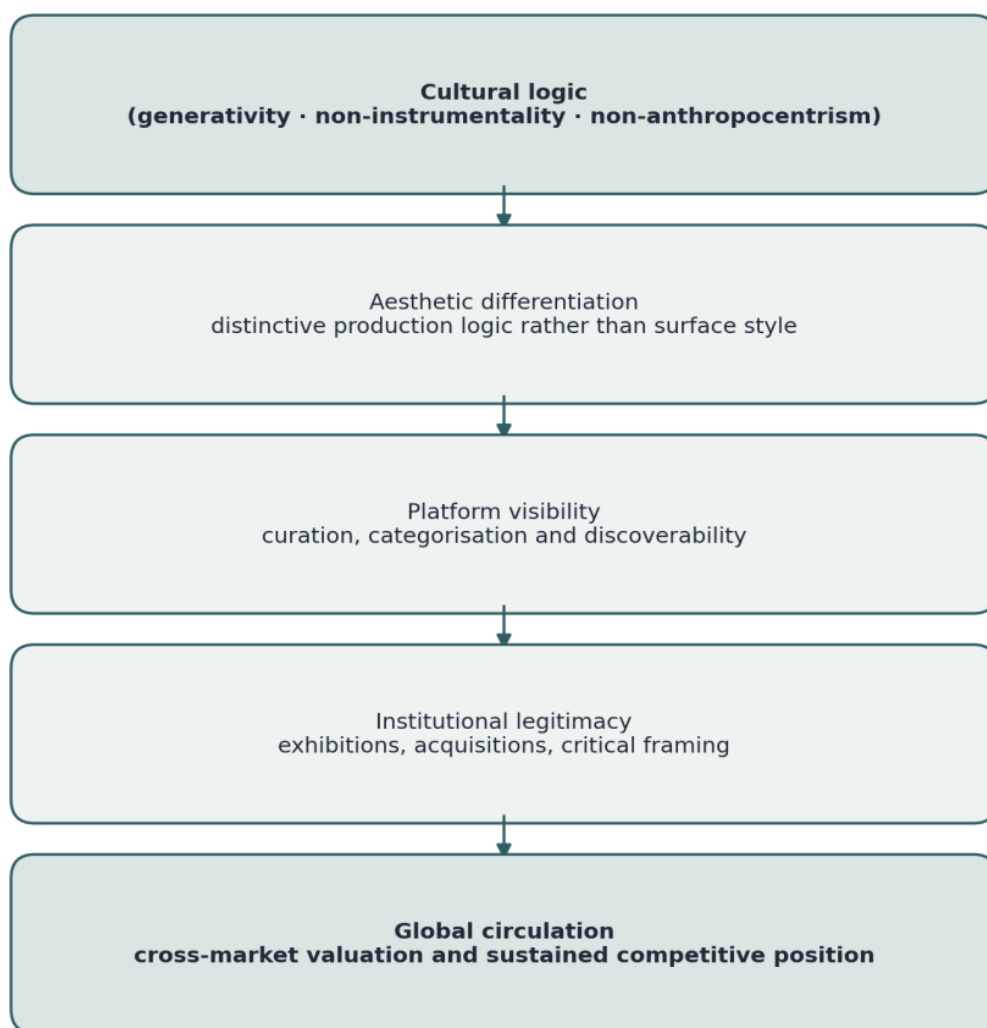


Figure 2 sets out the competitive mechanism implied by this analysis.

Figure 2. Competitive mechanism: from cultural logic to global circulation.

4.3 Three mechanism propositions

The analysis consolidates into three propositions of common form, each linking a Daoist logic

through a mediating mechanism to an industrial outcome.

MP1 (generativity). Daoist generativity leads to process-based authenticity, which leads to process valuation. Where generativity is embedded in production systems, value is

stabilized through iteration, system transparency and procedural originality rather than authorial intent. Observable in artist statements emphasizing system design, platform descriptions of provenance, and curatorial framing of system transparency as aesthetic value.

MP2 (non-instrumentality). Daoist non-instrumentality leads to contemplative experience, which leads to curated legitimacy. Competitive advantage depends on institutional contexts rewarding duration, while social-algorithmic contexts penalize slow-reveal aesthetics; the logic is therefore platform-contingent. Observable in programming foregrounding slow looking, visitor-flow designs resisting throughput optimization, and pricing signalling experiential quality over volume.

MP3 (non-anthropocentrism). Daoist non-anthropocentrism leads to distributed authorship, which leads to institutional acceptance. Where non-anthropocentrism structures authorship narratives, legitimacy increases in environments shaped by posthuman and ecological frameworks, translating into curatorial uptake and market differentiation. Observable in exhibition themes mobilizing posthuman vocabularies, acquisition rationales citing non-human agency, and biennial programming on environmental themes.

The three propositions share the form cultural logic, mediating mechanism, industrial outcome, which is the analytical core of a digital pathway; their scope is limited by the boundary conditions in Section 5.3.

4.4 Global circulation and cultural translation

Global circulation necessarily involves cultural translation, and a degree of de-philosophization appears structurally necessary: concepts must be rendered as experiences apprehensible without specialized knowledge of Chinese intellectual traditions. This is less a loss of meaning than a transformation of modality. Following Bhabha (1994), the misreadings such translation involves occur in a third space where meaning is renegotiated, and industrially they can generate forms that neither purely Chinese nor purely

Western markets would produce independently. The strategic question is not how to prevent misreading but how to shape the conditions of translation.

5. Competitive Advantages, Structural Constraints and Boundary Conditions

5.1 Competitive advantages

As the market matures, technical innovation alone yields diminishing returns for differentiation, and Daoist thought offers resources distinguishing works at the level of underlying logic rather than surface style. Non-anthropocentric perspectives align with institutional interest in posthuman and ecological art (Braidotti, 2019; Haraway, 2016); process-based aesthetics resonate with generative art; and non-instrumental approaches appeal to audiences experiencing attention fatigue (Citton, 2017; Wu, 2016).

Several dynamics reinforce these conditions. Major institutions increasingly prioritize ecological themes, for which Daoist non-anthropocentrism provides grounding; posthumanist theory creates receptive interpretive frameworks to which Daoist thought contributes an alternative genealogy; and global collectors increasingly seek non-Western traditions, a demand space philosophically grounded work can occupy without exoticism.

Non-adversarial cultural logic. In an era of geopolitical tension, overtly nationalistic cultural exports face resistance. The Daoist emphasis on non-contention permits engagement below the threshold of political sensitivity, enabling circulation where more assertive cultural logics encounter friction.

5.2 Structural constraints and risks

Platform instrumentalization. Platformization subjects cultural content to logics of attention, engagement and monetization (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Srnicek, 2017), within which Daoist aesthetics risks becoming a consumable style reduced to categorizable visual markers. Algorithmic tagging reduces complex logics to searchable categories, so that works are

recommended by visual similarity rather than conceptual coherence (Bucher, 2018; Gillespie, 2014); template reproduction follows; and attention-economy pressures disadvantage contemplative aesthetics (Citton, 2017; Paraman et al., 2022; Wu, 2016).

Structural inequalities in global art markets. The market remains structured by asymmetries disadvantaging non-Western production (Velthuis & Curioni, 2015). Pricing power is concentrated in Western institutions and collectors; discursive authority remains Western-dominated, so that Daoist thought must be translated into Western-legible vocabularies to achieve visibility; and legitimization infrastructures follow Western institutional norms. These asymmetries constrain competitiveness regardless of aesthetic merit.

Risks of aesthetic simplification. Once Daoist aesthetics becomes a recognizable market category, it may crystallize into a fixed repertoire of conventions no longer embodying the processual logic of Daoist thought itself, becoming paradoxically anti-Daoist in its rigidity.

5.3 Boundary conditions of digital cultural soft power

The pathways theorized here are conditional rather than general, and specifying when they fail is essential to both the validity and the usefulness

of the propositions. Three conditions govern MP1 to MP3.

Condition 1: platform type. Curated, institutional and long-form generative platforms reward duration, provenance and conceptual framing, permitting process authenticity and contemplative depth to be converted into value, whereas attention-optimized social platforms reward immediacy and penalize slow-reveal aesthetics. MP2 inverts across this boundary: the orientation that differentiates a museum experience becomes a liability in a feed.

Condition 2: audience cultural literacy. Where audiences possess interpretive frameworks, through familiarity with East Asian aesthetics or through posthuman and ecological discourse, Daoist-informed work is read as conceptually significant; where such frameworks are absent, it is consumed as visual style and differentiation collapses into genre. Cultural literacy is thus a condition of the mechanism.

Condition 3: institutional mediation. Curatorial framing, catalogue essays and acquisition rationales translate philosophical depth into legible value. Without such mediation, cultural difference is reduced to a label and exoticization becomes the default frame. MP3 depends almost entirely on this condition.

Table 4. Boundary conditions of the digital pathways of cultural soft power.

Boundary condition	Enabling configuration	Attenuating configuration	Consequence for the mechanisms
Platform type	Museum and curated platforms; long-form generative platforms; premium experience venues	Attention-optimized social platforms; speculative marketplaces prioritizing visual recognizability	MP1 and MP2 hold under the enabling configuration and weaken or invert under the attenuating one
Audience cultural literacy	Audiences with East Asian aesthetic familiarity or posthuman and ecological frames	Audiences without interpretive frames, reading works as decorative style	Depth valuation gives way to surface consumption; differentiation collapses into genre

Institutional mediation	Curatorial framing, criticism, catalogues, acquisition rationales	Absence of institutional mediation; direct platform circulation only	MP3 holds only under mediation; without it, labelling and exoticization dominate
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Stating these conditions converts the argument from a claim about potential into a falsifiable account of scope, and carries a practical implication: the strategic problem for non-Western cultural logics is less one of aesthetic quality than of securing the platform positions, audience competencies and institutional mediations under which such logics can be recognized.

5.4 Strategic implications for digital cultural industries

Three implications follow. First, effective mobilization requires resisting reduction to cultural symbols, embedding cultural logics in production processes rather than stylistic outputs and cultivating practitioners who understand Daoist thought as creative methodology rather than decorative reference. Second, the most sustainable advantage lies not in applying an aesthetic to existing technologies but in allowing cultural logic to inform technological development itself, through algorithm design informed by emergent logics and architectures that decentre human control. Third, digital art industries constitute cultural infrastructure in the sense intended by SDG 9: competitiveness depends on the technological and institutional capacity of the sector, and building that capacity in culturally diverse ways is a matter of industrial upgrading rather than cultural promotion (UNCTAD, 2022).

6. Conclusion

6.1 Contributions

Contribution 1: soft power as production rather than representation. The paper reconceptualizes cultural soft power from a symbolic attribute into an industrial and competitive process, shifting focus from national image projection to the mechanisms through which cultural logics are

embedded in technological systems, valuation regimes and aesthetic differentiation.

Contribution 2: a mechanism account for digital art industry studies. The three propositions, with the boundary conditions, provide a testable account of how production logic becomes platform visibility, and how visibility becomes valuation and institutional legitimacy.

Contribution 3: non-Western thought as innovation logic rather than content resource. By examining both potentials and constraints, the paper shows that non-Western philosophical traditions can function as sources of innovation logic rather than reservoirs of exportable content, and specifies what would be required for culturally diverse innovation capacity to be built into creative-industry infrastructure.

6.2 Implications for future research

The framework opens several avenues for empirical work: comparative case studies tracing market trajectories of Daoist-informed artworks; platform analysis of how algorithmic systems categorize non-Western aesthetics; reception studies testing the audience-literacy condition; and policy research on institutional frameworks supporting non-Western cultural logics. It can also be extended to other non-Western traditions.

6.3 Concluding reflection

Competition in digital art industries increasingly unfolds through aesthetic logics and industrial infrastructures rather than symbolic representation alone. For non-Western traditions to participate effectively, attention must shift from what cultures represent to how cultural logics can be operationalized within the systems that structure global digital culture.

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